Sectarianism in the Syrian Jazira: Community, land and violence in the memories of World War I and the French mandate (1915- 1939)

Cummunitarisme in de Syrische Jazira: Herinneringen aan Gemeenschap, land en geweld tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog en de Franse Mandaat (1915-1939)

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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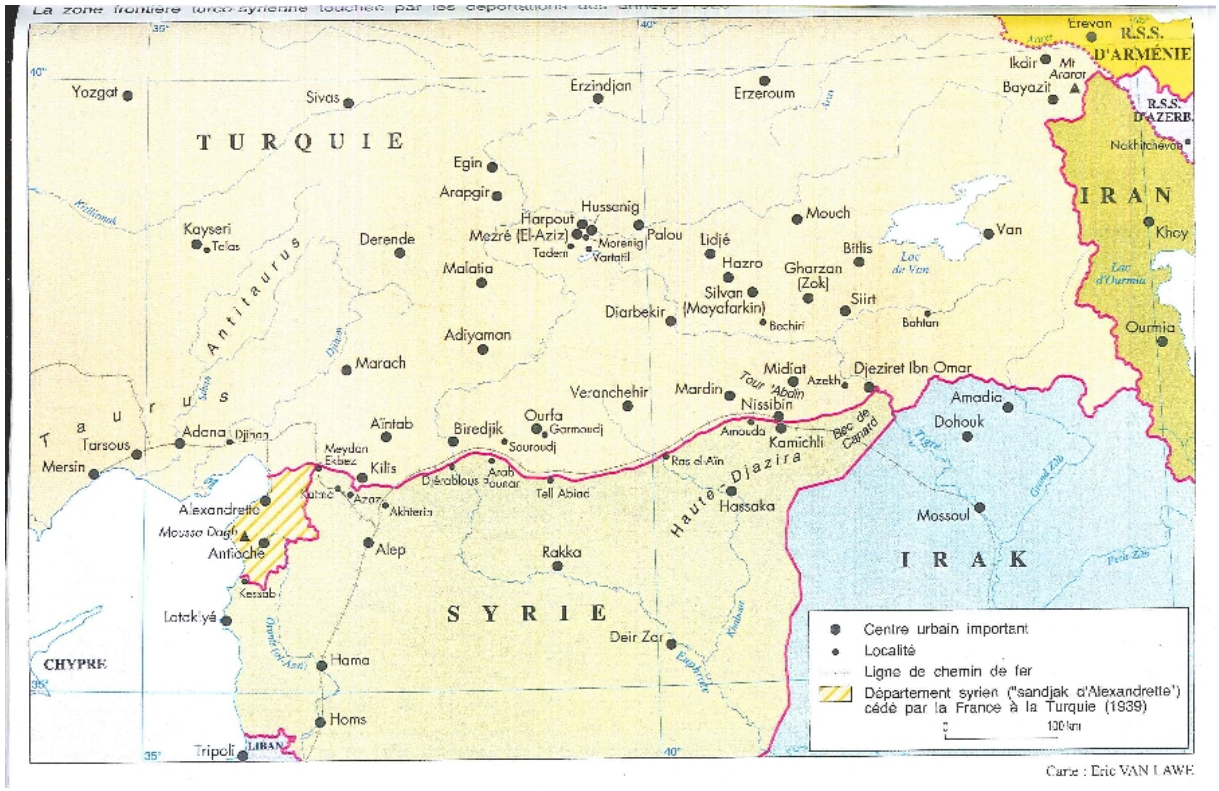
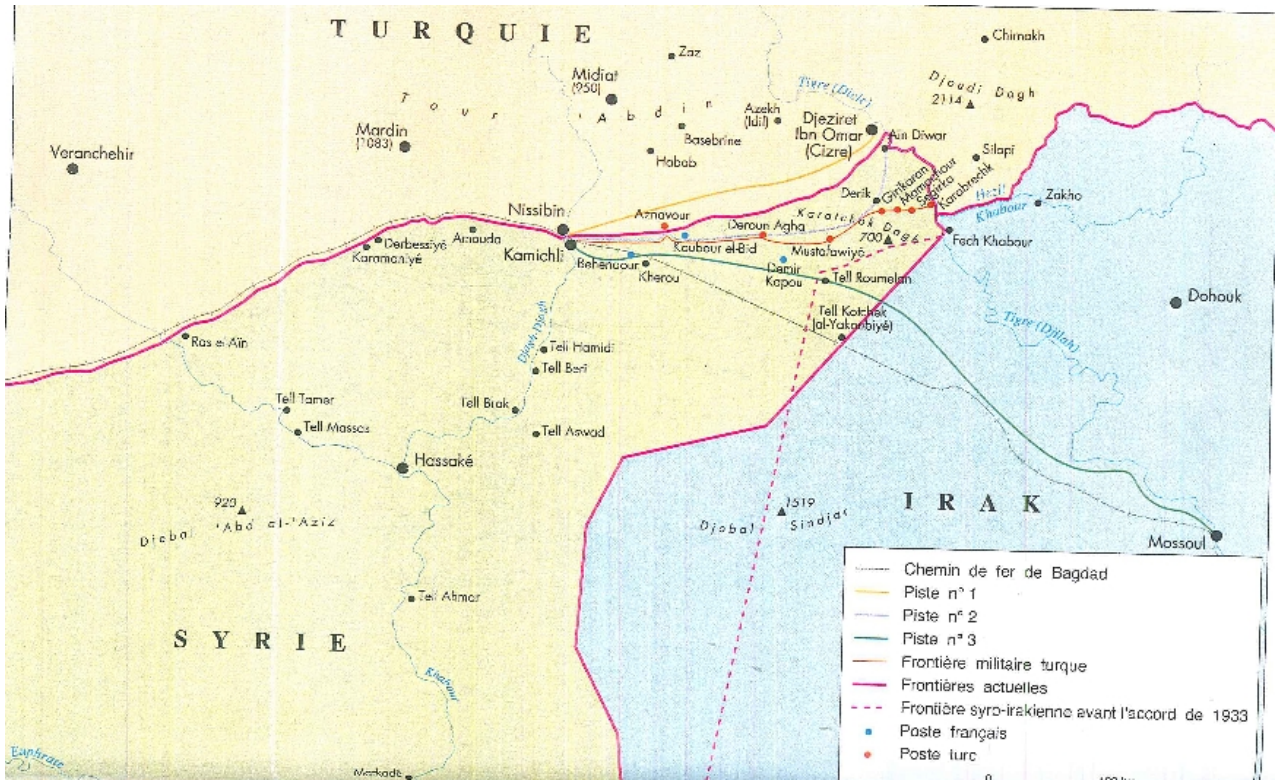
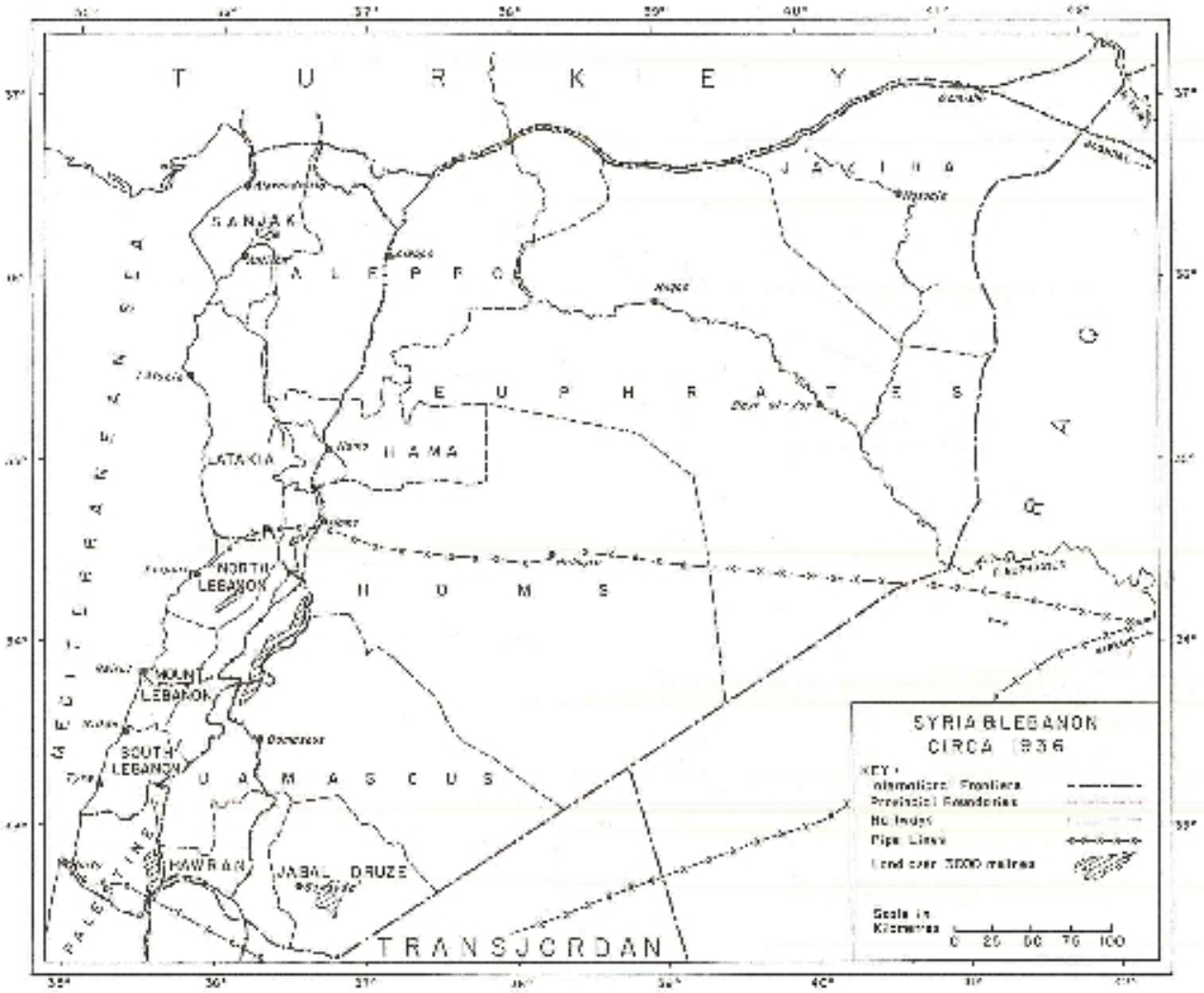
Maps



Map 1: Taken from Vahé Tachjian, *La France en Cilicie et en Haute Mésopotamie,* (Paris: Karthala, 2004).



Map 2: Taken from Vahé Tachjian, *La France en Cilicie et en Haute Mésopotamie,* (Paris: Karthala, 2004).



Syria and Lebanon during the French Mandate, circa 1936

Map 3: Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

Tables

Table 1: French Jazira, Population Figures, 31 December 1943 (source: CHEAM, L'état Civil en Syrie en Relation avec les Questions de Nationalité et de Statut Personnel des Communautés Religieuses, Emile Taupuenot, no. 50, n.d.)

	Sunni	Shiite	Alawi	Greek Orthodox	Greek Catholic	Armenian Orthodox	Armenian Catholic	Protestant	Maronite	Latin	Syriac Catholic	Syriac Orthodox	Chaldean	Jew	Yezidi	Nestorian	Total
Qaza of Hassaka	36.453	17	6	123	24	1123	878	105	11	5	859	4690	775	43	570	9172	54.853
Qaza of Qamishli	49.358	309	87	203	46	5822	856	249	43	22	1649	10539	684	1319	375	4	73.043
Qaza of Tigris	13.554	--		10		930	129	101	2	2	346	2564	506	76	30		18.100

Table 2: Qaza of Qamishli, end of 1936 (source: CADN; Cabinet Politique, Box 504, n.d.)

	Female	Male	Total
Armenian Catholics	228	252	480
Armenian Orthodox	2124	2393	4517
Syriac Catholics	642	598	1240
Syriac Orthodox	3517	3850	7357
Chaldeans	182	447	629
Protestants	90	84	174
Maronites	13	15	28
Latins	0	1	1

Greek Catholics	2	1	3
Greek Orthodox	6	13	19
Russian Mennonite	45	38	83
TOTAL CHRISTIANS	6839	7692	14531
Muslim Kurds (Sunni)	15.310	17.210	32.520
Muslim Arabs (Sunni)	5138	5758	10.896
Muslim Arabs (Shiite)	3	2	5
TOTAL MUSLIMS	20.451	22.970	43.421
Jews	716	746	1462
Yezidi	435	654	1089
TOTAL			60503

Note: 1) The above-mentioned figures do not include 20% of the Qamishli Christians who registered themselves as residents of Aleppo.

2) It should be taken into account that 20%- 30% of the Jazira residents are not enrolled in the above list.

3) The overall population of the whole Sanjak is 158.550: Arab (41.900), Circassian (1100), Jews (900), Yezidi (2150), Kurds (81.450), Christians (31.050)

Table 3: Population of the Sanjak of Jazira (Source: CADN, Cabinet Politique, Box 505, no. 204/DJ, from the High Commissariat de la République Française en Syrie et au Liban, Délégation de la Haute Djézireh to Monsieur le LT. Colonel Inspecteur Délégué, 8 February 1939)

HASSAKA

	Arab	**Kurd**	**Christian**	**Armenian**	**Kurdo-Christian**	**Yezidi**	**Assyrian**
City Centre	7133	360	5700	500			
Tell Tamer							8767
Ras al-'ayn	2283	1025	2263				
Sheddade	2610		6				
Tell Brack	4509	905		200			

QAMISHLI

	Arab	**Kurd**	**Christian**	**Armenian**	**Kurdo-Christian**	**Yezidi**	**Assyrian**
City centre	7990	5892	14.140	3500			
Amouda		11.260	1500			720	
	1300	11.365	1166			457	
Derbessiyye	3011	7899	2382			425	
Shager bazar	380	3810	3				

TIGRIS

	Arab	Kurd	Christian	Armenian	Kurdo-Christian	Yezidi	Assyrian
Ain Diwar		3068			900		
Derik	44	1685			1204		
Mustafiyya	344	959			50		
Derouna Agha	570	5097			27		
Tell Kochek	165						

Total	29.769	53.315	27.316	4200	2181	1602	8767
Nomads:	25.000 (?)						

Total: Muslim (84.685), Christians (42.464), Nomads (25.000 ?)

Table 4: Population figures 1939-40 (Comparison between the figures of the official Registry Office and the Village Headman (*Mukhtar*))
(Source: Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, File 56)

Qamishli (city centre)

	Registry Office	Village headman
Maronites and Latins	42	40
Chaldeans	376	500
Greek Orthodox	164	500
Jacobites	5544	8000

Syriac Catholics	470	500
Armenian Gregorian	3755	4500
Armenian Catholics	386	600
Protestants	155	200
Jews	1663	1200
Sunni Muslims	2243	2400
Shiite Muslims	309	20
Alawis	115	30
TOTAL	15.224	18.490

Hassaka (city centre)

	Registry Office	**Village headman**
Maronites and Latins	8	8
Chaldeans	409	530
Greek Orthodox	45	20
Jacobites	3364	2500
Syriac Catholics	739	700
Armenian Gregorians	598	550
Armenian Catholics	16	0
Protestants	69	50
Jews	51	0

Sunni Muslims	1160	600
Shiite Muslims	1	0
Alawis	8	0
Yezidis	59	0
Nestorians	23	100
TOTAL	7266	5708

Amouda (city centre)

	Registry Office	**Village headman**
Jacobites	627	750
Syriac Catholics	113	200
Armenian Gregorian	29	200
Armenian Catholics	21	140
Protestants	25	35
Sunni Muslim	2156	2200
TOTAL	2990	3540

Derbassiyya (city centre)

	Registry Office	**Village headman**
Latins	0	7
Chaldeans	54	80
Greek Orthodox	11	0
Jacobites	360	500
Syriac Catholics	96	260
Armenian Gregorian	76	210
Armenian Catholics	89	200
Protestants	0	5
Sunni Muslim	415	650
Greek Catholics	8	0
TOTAL	1109	1912

Ras al-'Ayn (city centre) (The figures of the Registry Office and the *Mukhtars* are the same)

	Registry Office/Village headman
Chaldeans	30
Greek Orthodox	20
Jacobites	293
Syriac Catholics	52

Armenian Gregorian	375
Armenian Catholics	91
Protestants	20
Sunni Muslim	900
TOTAL	1781

Introduction

> One wants to break free of the past: rightly, because nothing at all can live in its shadow, and because there will be no end to the terror as long as guilt and violence are repaid with guilt and violence; wrongly, because the past that one would like to evade is still very much alive.[1]

This is a historico-anthropological study of Jaziran Christians' and Kurds' memories of the Armenian genocide (1915) and of the French mandate period (1921-1939) that they lived through following their flight from their homeland to refuge in the French Jazira. The study is based on an interactive reading of history/ies and memories, and is structured around two main sets of questions. The first set concerns how the ways of remembering the post-1915 period, and the accompanying re-construction of the self and community in the Syrian Jazira, are re-configured by the present power relationships and by official and popular re-presentations of the past. The second set concerns how the events of 1915, and later the French mandate in Syria, as a social practice and discourse, haunt the present re-presentations of self and community.

The first set of questions is about the politics of the past, the ways in which various groups "work through and upon" the past, and how this historical process is implied in the construction of the "community."[2] What do the Jazirans remember of their post-1915 histories, and how to they remember them? How do they categorize their experiences? What is the role of remembering in the re-construction of communities and sectarianism in the Syrian Jazira? How does remembering relate to the ways in which the Syrian state structures and manages religious and ethnic differentiation as well as intercommunal and interethnic relations? How does the Syrian state's politics of difference build upon intra-communal and inter-religious rivalries for political and economic power? These are some of the questions that will be addressed.

The memories will be contextualized and traced back historically on the basis of archival and first-hand material; and this is where the twofoldedness of my research question lies. The second set of questions aims to historicize the rememberings. It tries to demonstrate the formative role of French mandate rule in the French Jazira, and trace the *change* of that rule into the post-independence Arab nationalist regimes through change in the modes of remembering—and, thus, changes in the subjectivity—of the Jaziran Kurds and Christians.

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[1] Theodor Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 89.
[2] For the difference between "working through" the past and "working upon" the past, see Theodor W. Adorno, "The Meaning of Working through the Past," in Rolf Tiedemann, ed., *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 3-19.

How was the weight of French politics in Jazira brought to bear on the range of political possibilities and modes of identification available to Jaziran Kurds and Christians in their post-Turkey lives? What effects did the establishment and maintenance of certain political, administrative and religious regulations during the mandate rule have in laying the roots and setting the foundational categories of Christian and Kurdish subjectivities in contemporary the Syrian Jazira? How is the *change* in power relations from Republican Turkey to French-Syria and then to post-colonial Syria implied in the memories? Throughout the chapters, the rememberings will be disentangled by reference to historical evidence; they will also be contextualized, analysed and interrogated in relation to the present-day power relationships in Syria.

I will limit my analyses to the Syrian Jazira, lying in the north-eastern part of modern Syria, where the Iraqi, Turkish and Syrian state borders intersect at its most eastern end. The region was a "no man's land" primarily reserved for the grazing land of nomadic and semi-nomadic Kurdish and Arab tribes until the beginning of the 20th century.[3] Unlike the Syrian steppe in its south, the *barriyya*, Jazira is a fertile plain bounded by the east bank of Euphrates on the one side and the Tigris on the other. The area is watered by the Balikh and Khabur rivers, both tributaries of the Euphrates.[4] The Syrian Jazira, with its population of displaced communities originating from across the border, is like a microcosm reflecting in reverse the dynamics of Turkey's nation-building. Its population largely consists of the last groups of the "undesirables" for whom Turkish nationalism left no space: genocide-survivor Christians belonging to different sects, among which Orthodox Armenians and Orthodox Syriacs form the majority and Syriac Protestants, Syriac Catholics and Armenian Catholics form the minority[5]; Jews from Nisibin; nomadic and semi-nomadic Kurdish tribesmen; and some nomadic Arab tribes. Originally from the environs of Diyarbekir and Mardin provinces, they survived for nearly a decade in a world turned upside-down after 1915, under the newly founded Turkish state rule. Christians from different sects and Jews began fleeing their homeland for the French Jazira during and immediately after the military suppression of the

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[3] Robert Montagne, "Quelques aspects du peuplement de la Haute Djeziré", *Bulletin d'Études Orientales, [BEO]*, II, (1932), pp. 53-66.

[4] For a detailed geographical assessment of the region, see André Gibert and Maurice Fevret, "La Djezireh Syrienne et son réveil économique", *Revue de Géographie de Lyon*, 28 (1953), pp. 1-15 and 83-99; Etienne de Vaumas, "La Djézireh", *Annales de Géographie* 65, no. 348 (1956), pp. 64-80; P. Poidebard, "Mission Archéologique en Haute Djezireh (Automne 1927)", *Syrie* 9 (1928), pp. 216-223. For the ancient history of the region, see Louis Dillemann, *Haute Mésopotamie Orientale et pays adjacents: Contribution à la géographie historique de la région* (Paris: Geuthner, 1962). For the *barriyya*, see Victor Muller, *En Syrie avec les Bédouins* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1931).

[5] are among the refugee groups, too.

Kurdish Sheikh Said Revolt (1925). Looking for a secure and viable life, the Kurds from the same region followed their Christian neighbours and crossed the then-open Turco-Syrian border for the French Jazira. Sunni Arabs, M'hallamis and Yezidis from different localities and tribes were added onto them. The forced displacements continued for more than two decades, until the early 1950s. As well as these groups, the region witnessed the gradual settlement of some Arab nomads, Shammar and Tayy, from the south whose old migration routes were disturbed by the delimitation of the Turco-Syrian border.[6]

Jaziran Kurds and Christians, subalterns and elites, be it under the Ottoman, Turkish Republican, French colonial or Syrian Arab nationalist rules, have been shaped by the processes and exigencies by which the wider society is informed. However, the region and its peoples enjoy also a particular history that engenders distinctive effects and subjectivities. The multi-ethnic and multi-religious population of Jazira consists of those who had witnessed the most violent face of the Ottoman Empire and the new Republican Turkey. As this thesis will demonstrate, the ways the Jazirans see themselves still continue to be worked on by official Turkish nationalist politics, in particular its denialism vis-à-vis the Armenian genocide, and its assimilationist policies towards the Kurds. Furthermore, Jazira forms one of the most economically and socio-culturally impoverished regions in present-day Syria. Being a region that was incorporated into Syrian territory no more than seventy years ago, it is one of the most religiously, ethnically and linguistically diverse provinces of Syria. After a short-lived, unsuccessful and controversial experience of political activism in which they demanded the continuation of the prevailing administrative autonomy of Jazira under the French rule (1936-1939), Jazirans and Jazira were tamed by the 'majority': people and place were castrated of their active transformative agency. Jazirans were ultimately transformed into de-political, "hardworking and simple people" in the eyes of the hegemonic majority. This image persisted almost until the Kurdish uprising in Qamishli in 2004.

From the early 1940s up until the late 1950s the region experienced a golden age, driven by an agricultural production boom, and attracted seasonal and permanent migrants as far as Aleppo but also from the neighbouring cross border region in Turkey. The economic, social and cultural impoverishment of the region gradually commenced during the United Arab Republic (UAR), united Syria and Egypt under the presidency of Nasser (1958-1961).

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[6] PRO, FO 371/13827, Pol. Eastern-Turkey, 1929, from Rendel to Eastern Department, 9 December 1929; for the population figures of Jazira in 1939, see Christian Velud, *Une expérience d'administration régionale en Syrie durant le mandat français: Conquête, colonisation et mise en valeur de la Gazira 1920-1936*, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Lyon, 1991, pp. 522-526; Vahé Tachjian, *La France en Cilicie et en Haute Mésopotamie* (Paris: Karthala, 2004), p. 175.

Political loyalty and disloyalty, socio-cultural marginality and historical claims of autochthony co-exist at the same time in different ways among different ethno-religious groups. At the same time, Jazira has seen the highest rates of emigration of Christians, primarily Syriac Orthodox and Catholic along with some Assyrians and Chaldeans.[7] While the Christian emigration for Northern European countries dates back to 1960s, Kurdish emigration is more recent and has been on the rise since the early 1990s. While seemingly an insignificant border region, several controversial manifestations of the Syrian state's political and economic policies are revealed and experienced here in their most evident and distressing forms. The politics of difference of the Syrian Ba'th state in the region paved the way for the deepening of the Kurdish problem and the straining of intercommunal relationships. Jazira may be considered as one of the places where the most radical and devastating projects of the Arab nationalist Ba'th ethno-politics have been implemented. The contradictions of the so-called "secular" Syrian state are most clearly disclosed in this region.

I will focus on three events and explore the ways in which they are reconstituted in memories: the 1915 Armenian genocide, the early French rule and the controversial 1936-1939 years in the French Jazira. I take 1915 to be the crucial event, since 1915 signifies a moment when the discontinuity with the past is maximized and "the crucial event performs the symbolic function of closing past accounts and opening a new era."[8] The rememberings as well as the oblivions, silences, omissions or gaps in the narration of these periods will be taken into account since, as Benedict Anderson writes, "all profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias and out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives."[9] These narratives provide instances of the workings of memory in the creation of particular Syrian sectarian-nationalist imagery.

At the outset, this study was not intended to cover such a broad range of events or revolve around the above-mentioned themes, but rather aimed to study the memories of the making of the Turkish-Syrian border from the borderland peoples' perspective. The themes I originally identified were informed by critical border studies, state-making and nation-building

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[7] R. J. Mouawad, "Syria and Iraq, Repression, Disappearing Christians of the Middle East", *Middle East Quarterly,* VIII, 1 (Winter 2001), http://www.meforum.org/17/syria-and-iraq-repression.

[8] Alessandro Cavalli, "Patterns of Collective Memory", discussion paper no. 14, presented at Collegium Budapest, June 1995, pp. 2, 4. Cavalli argues that crucial events mark a "discontinuity and therefore require the reconstruction of a sense of continuity"; taken from Biray Kolluoglu, "Forgetting the Smyrna Fire," *History Workshop Journal* 60 (2005), pp. 25-44.

[9] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 204.

processes in non-western contexts. I aimed, basically, to demystify the Turco-Syrian border and the Turkish and Arab nationalist ideologies that sustain it. In this manner, I planned to re-configure the historical narratives of the foundation of the Syrian Jazira that are intrinsic to the Turkish, French, Arabic, Syriac or Kurdish nationalist canons, and which share hardly any common themes—which, indeed, can hardly be said to refer to the same historical event. I aimed eventually to frame a more accurate and elaborate trans-border history and provide an account of the peoples of the region.

However, the "field" forced me to modify the scope and reformulate the key questions of my study. During my research in the eastern stretch of the Turkish-Syrian border, I realized that the border was not alone in defining Christians' or Kurds' senses of themselves, their sense of their relations to the broader society around them, nor their relationships with the states controlling the territory on both sides of the border. Not only did border practices matter in different ways depending on ethnic, religious and tribal affiliations, but the border was also re-constituted differently in memories as a "side-effect" of other crucial events—and so were the communities. Besides this, there was an enormous gap between what I had read in the secondary sources and the memories themselves, especially with regards to the history of the French Jazira. Despite the fact that the arrival of Armenians, Syriacs[10] and Kurds in the French Jazira dates back not to the immediate aftermath of 1915, but rather to the second turmoil—the Sheikh Said Revolt of 1925—that the region witnessed, the 1915 massacres during the Ottoman Empire formed the plot of *all* historical narratives, especially among the Jaziran Christians but also among the perpetrator Kurds, though in different ways. The memories of 1915, or the *ferman*, are a juncture: it holds a key position, particularly in Christians' imagination of self and community; while the Sheikh Said Revolt appears as a significant reference point in the periodization of individual histories as well as in the history of all Jazirans, regardless of ethnicity, religion, class or locality. The effect of the Sheikh Said Revolt on the non-Kurdish inhabitants of the region, in particular the Christian groups, was highly disregarded in the secondary literature, though

The history of the "community" as narrated by the Armenians and the Syriacs, or even the "objective histories" of the mandate period, begins with the lengthy and extensive narratives of violence of all kinds that they were exposed to *back* in their home towns, on their way to,

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[10] Syriacs refer to themselves as *Suryoye* in Aramaic, *Suryani* in Arabic and *Assyrian* (in Arabic and Aramaic *Ashuri)* depending on one's political standing whether he/she embraces an ethnic or religious denifition of Syriacness. I adopted the standard English usage, *Syriac*, throughout the thesis except he/she did not opt for other namings.

or prior to their arrival in (French) Syria. The historical narratives of the Christians in particular usually obscure the French mandate rule and the colonial agency; rather, they assimilate it into a survival narrative where the main provider is depicted as the "Syrians" if not the "community" itself. The Kurds, on the contrary, submerge the history into their burdensome present; that is to say, the history of both 1915, the delimitation of the border and the colonial period are overwhelmed by their under-class status in present day Syrian Jazira, which is presented as a history of permanent state(s) oppression since 1925 up to the present.

To my surprise, I discovered that the "constitutive outside" of the self, the community and the Other(s) in narratives of local history or the border referred not only to the *past* events and discourses in French-Syria, but also to the other side of the border in *Turkey*.[11] As well as this, their memories were situated in relation to *present* discourses and practices that traversed the borders of the nation-state, and to other global discourses. After all, the *current* order of things in *Syria* played a formative role in Jazirans' narratives. Various reconstructions of the past in the Syrian Jazira were informed by the official Ba'th discourses and embedded in the existing power relations in *present*-day Syria, yet varied according to class, religion, sect, gender, geographical location and so on. The Kurdish question, the state–(Christian) community relations and the gradual *change* in makeup of the economic and cultural capital and capital holders in the Syrian Jazira coloured the ways in which the past was recast. Any study of the Syrian Jazirans, then, should take into account the complex intermingling between these three discursive and practical levels.

"Religious difference," in the form of the "state-acknowledged sect" (*ta'ifa*), appeared as the most significant marker of *difference* employed in Jazirans' historical narratives, especially by Christians, in ways that I had not foreseen prior to my research in the region at all. The Christians' memories spoke of the nature of the relations between Christians and Muslims/Kurds in the *past* in Turkey. The indignation, mournfulness and sadness evoked in the rememberings of their *pre*-Syrian lives implied "difference" and were usually articulated through a discourse of agony. They stood in stark contrast to the discourse of harmony through which their post-Syrian lives are described. It became the primary mode of identification among different Christian sects, in their self-understandings, in their relationship with other Christian sects, with the non-Christians, including the Kurds and the Arabs, and the state. Historical narratives of Kurds, however, adopted a different self-identification and relationality in their relationship with other ethnic and religious groups in

[11] For the notion of "constitutive outside", see Anna Marie Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic imaginary* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 123.

Syria, in particular the Christians and the Arabs, and the state; the temporality of their historical narratives was more linear, expressing an enduring oppression that traverses borders and political regimes. The way the Kurds articulate their difference is in ethnic terms, an *un*recognised sense of belonging which is denied and repressed by the Syrian (as well as the Turkish) state. As whole, religious and ethnic identifications, the axes of social differentiation and two significant idioms in the relations in between Jazirans, others and the state were often resorted to in Jazira, which arguably is in direct contradiction to the secularism and Arabism endorsed by the Syrian state. Such "self-understandings" and "modes of identification" or the different "forms of association" of a religious group (*madhab*) acknowledged by the state as a sect (*ta'ifa*), will be referred as sectarianism (*ta'ifiyya*) throughout the thesis.[12] Various appropriations of the state's politics of difference and their political implications will be mentioned in the coming pages.

It is a truism today to refer to ethnic identification of Kurds as Kurdish nationalism. This is a fair identification because, in the Turkish, Iraqi and Iranian contexts, Kurdish nationalism, as an ideology and practice, was formed and transformed in response to the dominant assimilationist Turkish, (Iraqi) Arab and Iranian nationalisms. However, in the Syrian case, in addition to the role of assimilationist (Ba'th) Arab nationalism, the politics of difference of the Syrian state—i.e. state-sponsored sectarianism and denialism vis-à-vis the Kurds—has very significant implications in engendering (ethnic) inequality in Jazira, more so than anywhere else in Syria. The Kurdish issue in Syria cannot be viewed independently of these *two* conflictual encounters between the Kurds and Kurdish nationalism on the one hand, and the Ba'th Arab nationalisms and state-sponsored Christian sectarianism on the other (in particular Syriac sectarianism/Assyrian nationalism). In this sense, this thesis will present an additional perspective to the Kurdish question in Syria by bringing the sectarianism issue into the picture. Throughout the thesis, I will employ the term "Kurdish nationalism" when I refer to Kurds' (ethno-religious) belonging. I will qualify what I mean by "nationalism" when necessary.

The "sect" was connected to being Syrian in different ways. Sectarian or, at times, religious difference—usually Christian vs. Muslim/Kurdish—was always connected to and interacted with other social categories, particularly class. The reverse was also true. Based on this 'field-awareness', this thesis attempts to avoid replicating the sectarian/nationalist

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[12] I borrow such a conceptualisation of sectarianism from Max Weis. Max Weiss, "Institutionalizing Sectarianism: Law, Religious Culture, and the Remaking of Shi'i Lebanon, 1920–1947", unpublished PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 2007.

approach of approaching people first and foremost as 'types' or members of their ethno-religious groups, ready to fill the slots prepared for them—though I know that one can never completely avoid this. Still, I try to begin the investigation at a prior stage and see whether, when, how and in which contexts in their memories people re-present themselves as "Syriacs," "Armenians," "Kurds," with or without their hyphenated forms with "Syrian"; where and when they ethnicize others; where do these labels collapse; and when do contradictions arise. Concerning the relation between the imaginations of community and power, this thesis will inquire the following questions: How do the prevailing power relations in Syria interact with people's historical narratives? What is the role of the state in sharpening and solidifying difference? How does the state's politics of difference build upon intra-communal and inter-religious rivalries for political and economic power? How do the prevailing power relations in Syria interact with the ways in which people re-present themselves as members of a certain group, sect or nation?

Sectarianism

My surprise in the region might be approached as a social phenomenon reflecting the limits of the critical intellectual climate in Turkey, from which my mindset has to a large extent been informed. Further, and more significant for the purposes of this thesis, it reflects the state of the scholarship on Syria and on post-Ottoman Levant states in general. Modern-Syria is the least-studied country in comparison to other Levant states—Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine. Until very recently, it has suffered from a scarcity of social history studies and ethnographic research. It is dominated by over-generalizing, state-centric and essentialist perspectives, usually in international relations, geopolitics or political history from above. Economics forms another arena of research, but from a macro and state-centric perspective focusing in particular on nationalization projects and the agrarian reforms of the 1950s and 1960s. Intercommunal relations and state–society relations from below have remained the most neglected areas of study. Most of the historical and social science studies on Syria are urban-centred and elitist; they are rarely inspired by critical theories and debates in other disciplines and areas, such as the critical theory or post-structuralist debates that have extensively influenced South Asian studies and even studies on other Middle Eastern countries like Egypt and Iran.

Overall, sectarianism, especially as a social and cultural notion, has not played a major role in the historiography of Syria—as opposed to Lebanon, whose politics and culture is

virtually assumed to be equivalent to sectarianism.[13] Despite the fact that the studies on Lebanese and Iraqi sectarianism are overridden by the question of modernity vs. tradition, and have taken collective belongings such as national, communal and religious belongings as natural categories of analysis, in Syria sectarianism has not been treated as a Syrian question, neither in academic nor in political debates, and has at best been exported from outside.[14]

Domestic, regional and global issues play a role this neglect. The repressive conditions that have existed in the country in recent decades, and the intense monitoring of social interactions by the totalitarian Syrian state, have hindered critical social science studies on Syria. Ba'th-Syria is a totalitarian state run by a president to whom the military and political clique are solely loyal and accountable. Despite the Constitution, the People's Assembly (*majlis al-sha'b*) and the governing coalition, the National Progressive Front (*al-jabha al-wataniyya al-taqaddumiyya*), Ba'th continues to be the single most powerful party in the latter coalition. These institutions are formal structures created by Hafiz al-Asad (in office 1971-2000) in the early 1970s, and they form a façade used for the legitimization of the regime. From the Ba'th revolution (1963) onwards, the country has officially been in a "state of emergency" (*hala al-tawari*). The intelligence services (*mukhabarat*) and the military are the two central instruments of power and are the strongest actors on the political scene.[15] The *mukhbarat* with its repressive practices and symbolic power has become the key institution disseminating fear among the Syrians from all backgrounds. Oppositional voices are violently repressed either through direct killings, forced exiles, or in military 'exceptional' courts (*mahakam al-'askariyya al-istithnaiyya*).[16] Since the 1970s, thousands of political activists, both among the left and the Islamist opposition, have been jailed, tortured, executed and

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[13] Sectarianism under the Syrian Ba'th state is an extremely understudied topic. To cite the most comprehensive studies: Elizabeth Picard, "Y a-t-il un problème communautaire en Syrie?" *Maghreb-Machrek*, 87 (Jan-Mars 1980), pp. 7-23; Itamar Rabinovich, "Problems of Confessionalism in Syria," in Gustav Stein and Udo Steinbach (eds.), *The Contemporary Middle East Scene* (Opladen: Leske Verlag 1979), pp. 128-32; Michel Seurat, *L'État de barbarie* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), pp. 84-99; Laurent Chabry and Annie Chabry, *Politique et minorités au Proche-Orient: Les Raisons d'une Explosion*, (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1987) and and Nicola Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria* (NY, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), chapter 2.

[14] There is a vast literature about sectarianism in Lebanon and Iraq, though they usually suffer from nationalist or orientalist premises. For a critical review of the historiography of sectarianism in Lebanon, see Max Weiss, "The Historiography of Sectarianism in Lebanon", *History Compass*, 7, 1 (2009), pp. 141–154. For the Iraqi case in a similar critical vein, see Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq The Other Iraq Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (California: Stanford University Press, 2009) and Sami Zubaida, "Community, Class and Minorities in Iraqi Politics" in Robert Fernea and William Roger Louis (ed.), *The Iraqi Revolution of 1958*: *The Old Social Classes Revisited* (London: IB.Taruis, 1991), pp.197-210.

[15] Volker Perthes, *The Political Economy of Syria under Asad* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), pp. 146 and 193. The *Mukhabarat* employs at least 65,000 full-time officers and several thousand part-timers, occasional collaborators and informers.

[16] See Middle East Watch, *Syria Unmasked*, *The Suppression of Human Rights by the Asad Regime1991* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 41.

deprived of basic political and human rights.[17] Up until the end of the 1980s, the real and the symbolic power of the state and its intelligence service was overwhelming. It aimed to control and to monopolize the public and the political space as a whole. Fear was embodied in space, in people's minds and bodies. Similarly, the politics of fear was also quite effective among the non-Syrian researchers until the early 1990s, after which the hold of the state over society started to decline—though in relative terms only—and several amnesties for political prisoners were declared.[18] However, it must be pointed out that these moves are hardly motivated from a genuine "political reform" perspective, but unfortunately are more to do with the near-absence of any oppositional activity as a real threat to the Ba'th rule, and the change in the international atmosphere after the end of the Cold War. However, strict censoring continues of the media, universities, social organizations and, above all, political space—if there is much left. The near-absence of studies on post-1963 Syria in Syrian universities is not solely a result of individual choice, but points to what Judith Butler refers to as the "invisible censorship" in Syria that serves as "the line that circumscribes [not only] what is speakable [but also] what is livable."[19]

Paradoxically, it seems, the relative peace and absence of a "Lebanon-like" sectarian conflict between different religious and ethnic groups in the country is another reason underlying the neglect of critical analysis of religious and ethnic issues in Syria. Compared with the "sectarian violence" in Lebanon and in Iraq, the fact that a Lebanon-like political sectarianism is not only absent but strictly forbidden in Syria is one of the most significant reasons for this neglect. Population figures also played a role. According to recent statistics by the CIA Factbook, Sunni Muslims formed 74% of the population, while Alawite (9%) Druze (3%), and other Muslim sects formed 16%, and Christians from various sects formed 10% of the population, while in Lebanon, Muslims form 59, 7 % population (with 20% Sunni, 28%-39% Shi'a and around 5% Druze). Christians from 18 recognised sects form 39% of the Lebanese population.[20] The Christian population in post-colonial Syria is made up as follows:

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[17] The best-known example is the armed uprising of 1982 in Hama, when the army shelled the historic centre killing thousands of civilians together with the rebels. Estimates vary from 5,000 to 25,000 people dead. Hanna Batatu, "Syria's Muslim Brethren", *MERIP reports*, 110 (November- December 1982), pp. 12-20.

[18] Amnesty International reported in June 2000 that at least 1,500 political prisoners were held in Syrian jails, while thousands of earlier detainees had 'disappeared', and probably been murdered.

[19] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), pp. xix-xx. In this book Butler argues that the ways in which forms of visible censorship after Sepetmber 11 produce a public sphere characterized by the culture of fear and control serve as modes of invisible censorship to silence potential opposition to America's "holy" war on terrorism. Her statement also accords with the state of Syrian society after five decades of Ba'th totalitarianism.

[20]https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html
https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html#People

the Greek Orthodox Church, being the oldest and most established in Syria, has 503,000 members; the Greek Catholic church has 118,000 adherents; the Maronites have 28,000. Among the ex-refugees, Armenian Orthodox number nearly 112,000; Armenian Catholics 25,000; Syriac Orthodox 89,000; and Syrian Catholics 22,000. Assyrian Christians who found refugee in Iraq in 1933 are 17,000 in number, and Chaldean Catholics 7,000. The Latins are around 11,000, and the Protestants and the Anglicans of Syria are 20,000.[21]

Evidently more significant than the population figures, the absence of Christians' claim to political rule and representation after the failure of the 1936-39 sectarian pro-Christian movement in French-Syria is, I argue, another important reason of the mentioned disregard. Chapter 4 of the thesis is reserved for this period and its long-lasting implications.

Besides this, the neo-imperial domination of the whole region and the resulting conflicts, the Palestine issue being the most significant, as well as the controversial Lebanese–Syrian relations, oversaturate the region and scholarly studies with high politics and geopolitical studies. The pro-Soviet political stance of Ba'th-Syria during the Cold War was an additional factor fed into such perspectives. Frequent coup d'états and rivalry between the traditional and the new elites in the post-colonial period until the Ba'th revolution (1963) diverted scholarly attention towards the political and economic dynamics underlying the "struggle for Syria." It is mainly the Ba'th period which brought the sectarianism issue into the fore in academic and political rhetoric, as the core of the state has to a great extent been formed of Alawi officers since the 1963 Ba'th coup, and especially since Hafiz al-Asad's "corrective movement" in 1970. Alawis have monopolized the crucial positions in the public sector and the army, and staffed even minor positions in the state mechanisms and bureaucracy.[22] However, sectarianism debates were squeezed into the perspective of "majority Sunni" vs. "minority Alawite" vying for political and economic power. This perspective is evidently related to the powerful Islamist opposition of the Muslim Brotherhood against the regime in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which was organized around the widespread corruption,

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[21] R. J. Mouawad, "Syria and Iraq, Repression, Disappearing Christians of the Middle East," *Middle East Quarterly* 8, 1 (Winter 2001). http://www.meforum.org/17/syria-and-iraq-repression

[22] Alasdair Drysdale, "The Asad Regime and Its Troubles", MERIP Reports, 1982; Nikolaos van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Sectarianism, Regionalism and Tribalism in Politics, 1961-1978* (London: Croom Helm, 1979); Moshe Ma'oz, "Alawi Officers in Syrian Politics, 1966-1974," in H.Z. Schriffrin (ed.) *The Military and State in Modern Asia* (Jerusalem: Academic Press, 1976), pp. 277-97; Hanna Batatu, "Some Observations on the Social Roots of Syria's Ruling Military Group and the Causes for Its Dominance," *Middle East Journal* 35 (1980), pp. 331-44; Raymond Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution from Above* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 276-300; Volker Perthes, *The Political Economy of Syria under Asad*, (London/NY: I.B.Tauris, 1995).

nepotism, and enormous enrichment of the ruling elite, yet also borrowed from the stereotypical representations of "corrupted Alawis."[23]

A wider understanding of the culture of sectarianism in Syria and different processes of sectarianization within each community, including the practice and sectarian codes of identification among the various Christian sects, Druzes and the Kurds, is virtually non-existent in the scholarly work.[24]

Western historiography on Syria usually takes as a point of departure the orientalist and essentialist assumption that Syria's "weakness" and political instability in the post-colonial period are mainly due to Syria's "artificiality," and that the Syrian nation has not become a "coherent nation."[25] Syria is argued to be devoid of historical roots thanks to the partition of the region in the immediate aftermath of World War I, which divided "natural Syria" into parts. Ascribing "political artificiality" to Syria is translated into the ideological sphere as an eternal and overwhelming conflict between the pan-Arab ideal and Syrian-Arab nationalism.[26] The same idealist standpoint views Syrian society and Middle Eastern societies in general, as a collection of rites and religions in hostile rivalry with each other. The deferral of the formation of a modern, secular and class-based society is explained through the renowned "mosaic society thesis" as exemplified in the words of George Roux: "It is an extraordinary mosaic, a veritable museum of religions; it is as if the land is chosen for the genesis of schisms, heresy and fragmentation. The region is a mess of feudalities and entangled rites that hate each other."[27]

Such an imagination of the non-western society composed of people with primordial religious attachments and atavistic traditions whose interrelationship is an inescapable violent conflict, a violence which is devoid of social and cultural meaning has been extremely

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[23] Thomas Pierret, "Le Projet politique 'pour la Syrie de l'avenir' des Frères Musulmans" in B. Dupret, Z. Ghazzal, Y. Courbage and M. Al-Dbiyat (eds.), *La Syrie au présent : reflets d'une société*.(Paris: La Découverte, 2007), pp. 729-738

[24] There are two critical dissertations on the history and culture of sectarianism in Syria though. Benjamin White, *The Nation-State Form and the Emergence of 'Minorities' in French Mandate Syria, 1919–1939*, Unpublished PhD dissertation, Oxford University, St. Anthony's College, 2009 and Panagiotis Geros, *When Christianity Matters: The Production and Manipulation of Communalism in Damascus, Syria*, Unpublished PhD dissertation, SOAS, University of London, 2007.

[25] Milton J. Esman and Itamar Rabinovich, *Ethnicity, Pluralism and the State in the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1988); Nikolaos van Dam, *The Struggle*; Eyal Zisser, "Who's Afraid of Syrian Nationalism? National and State Identity in Syria," *MES* 4, no. 2 (2006), pp. 179-198; Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2000); André Raymond, ed., *La Syrie d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: CNRS, 1980). The immediate aftermath of the mandate period (1946-1958) is called "the struggle for Syria." Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-war Arab Politics, 1945-1958* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965).

[26] James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[27] Georges Roux, "La Rectification du Traite Franco-Syrien," *Revue de Paris*, 7 (1938), p. 626.

influential in the western literature from the late 18th and early 19th century until today. Coherent typologies were created for every ethno-religious group in the country, such as the Bedouins, Druzes, Armenians, Catholics, Syriacs, Greek Orthodox, Alawites, Ismailis. The mosaic society model was hegemonic in the French colonial mindset, too. As will be demonstrated in the memories of 1915 Armenian Genocide in Chapter 2, these ethno-religious groups were described through concepts such as *tribal*, *urban*, *stubborn*, *free* or *civilized* which hardly corresponded to their self-identifications, and upon which the idea of the difference and separateness of each group were built.[28] Moreover, the writings on Syria and Lebanon evoked a "timeless Biblical land" that appealed to the west as one "to be saved from the Muslim yoke."[29] Even the titles of the (non)scholarly books, articles, reports and pamphlets on French-Syria published by the pro-colonial circles reveal the underlying French colonial perspective, wherein the Christians are viewed as the 'victims suffering under Muslim domination for centuries'. Apparently, the French mandatory rule established and legitimized itself by relying on this understanding of Syrian society through representing itself as the 'protector of the Christians of the Levant against the Muslim yoke'.

The Syrian-Arab nationalists have attempted to produce a counter-hegemonic History. However, they also begin by embracing the discourse of "artificiality" of Syria, yet by describing it, in Ghassan Salame's words, as "always less" (*du toujours moins*),[30] mainly because the Syrians had not been given any collective national agency in determining their own national borders following the imperial partitioning of Syria between France and Britain with the Sykes Picot agreement (1915) and the later ceding of the Sanjak of Alexandretta to Turkey (1939). Nevertheless, the discourse of deficiency is never subordinated to an absolute victimization discourse. The "national will" is never superimposed in an absolute sense.[31]

A similar idealism is reflected in Syrian Arab nationalist perspective on sectarianism, as will be explained in more detail below. First of all, secular nationalist writing in Syria is impaired concerning those moments of sectarian hostilities, conflict and violence. Interreligious conflict becomes an anxiety blemishing the "the trans-historical virtues of tolerance, diversity and coexistence, which are supposedly embodied in Turkish and Arab

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[28] Several of these westerners were surprised when they witnessed similarities in dress, habits, language and habits between the Christians and the Muslims.
[29] Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism, Community, History and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: UCLA, 2000), p. 15.
[30] Ghassan Salama, *Al-Mujtama` wa al-dawla fi al-Mashriq al-`arabi* [State and Society in the Arab Levant] (Beirut: CAUS, 1987; reprint 1999), p. 59.
[31] For the Turkish case, see Tanıl Bora, "Milliyetçiliğin vatanı neresi?" *Birikim* 213 (January 2007), p. 30.

nationalism."[32] While the colonial discourse viewed sectarianism as a manifestation of primordial belongings, the Arab nationalists viewed it as a product of colonial knowledge. The Syrian-Ba'th nationalist ideology has depicted sectarianism as a consequence of Ottoman divide-and-rule policies, and, later, European (primarily French) political intrigues and population policies against the "eternal" Syrian-Arab nation. The Kurdish issue, too, is viewed as a foreign intrigue.[33] The most common shortcoming of the nationalist perspectives is that they take notions like *nation* and *community* as self-made, ahistorical and essentialist categories. The fact that these notions have historically been constructed in relation to the power relations at a certain time and place has been underestimated. On the contrary, these notions are granted "strong ontological status"[34] and seen as "satisfactorily proven and merely a matter of traceable historical development, through the chronology of 'awakening' or 'self-realisation' and the cultural-political process of institutionalising identity."[35] Lisa Weeden, in her innovative work on Syrian political culture during Hafiz al-Asad's reign, stresses the role of '*as-if*' politics in sustaining the regime.[36] Inspired by her perspective, I argue that the Ba'th regime is sufficiently hegemonic to persuade its citizens that sectarianism is as is a non-Syrian problem.

Unlike in other post-Ottoman states such as Turkey and Greece, studies on the various "sects" in Syria are not rare. A fair number of studies do exist, written especially by the Syrian-Armenian or Syriac writers; however, these studies too are already informed by the official ideology of the sects themselves where they are imagined as ahistorical, bounded and homogonous entities unaffected by the wider context in Syria. Obviously, the official state discourse of "harmonious coexistence of different faiths" is intrinsic to these studies, too. These works rely on unquestioned dichotomies and categories, such as Muslim vs. Christian, Jewish vs. Arab, Kurdish vs. Arab, west vs. east and so on. Disproportional to the current level of incorporation of the post–World War I Armenian and other Christian refugees into Syrian society, very few works integrate the social and political history of the 'community' into the history of Syria. The post-genocide phase in Syria goes without critical questioning; withal the categories employed in the analysis are left unquestioned. As will be demonstrated

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[32] Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, p. 6.
[33] Related bibliography about the Kurdish issue in Syria will follow in the next chapter.
[34] Taken from James Mc Dougall who discusses similar historiographical problems in the North African context, James Mc Dougall, "Introduction. History/culture/politics of the nation", *Journal of North African Studies*, 8, 1 (2003), p. 2.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Lisa Weeden, "Acting 'as if': Symbolic Politics and Social Control in Syria," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1998 (40), pp. 503–523.

in the coming chapters, these works imagine and represent a *de-politiicized and reified* Christian community. Comparatively much less in number and depth, scholarly works on Kurds, however, *over-politicize* the Kurds. Fair enough, perhaps, since the Kurdish issue in Syria oversaturates the studies on Syrian Kurds. Overall, a state-centred and top-down understanding of politics informs these studies; and, besides, they unfortunately lack a wider historical perspective which incorporates the issue of sectarianism into the picture.

Not that there are no critical studies concerning Arab nationalism and state–society relations in Syria. Several scholars and left-wing political activists have tried to overcome these essentialist and static perspectives and their politically conservative implications. Zachary Lockman's work on Palestine is distinctive in this respect.[37] His work attempts to challenge the underlying premises of what he calls the "dual society model," that is that various religious/ethnic groups in the society are presupposed to be essentially separate and distinct with disconnected historical trajectories, that the "influence of each group on the other is assumed to be marginal and extraordinary, and more importantly the single significant mode of interaction between these groups is assumed to be conflict, violent or otherwise".[38] He proposes a "relational history" project by dwelling upon those areas of activity in which Jewish and Arab people interacted with each other. Despite the fact that the Palestinian dynamics are rather different than the Syrian case, this thesis is inspired by this relational history project, as well as by several other critical writers who have questioned the mosaic society model by arguing that institutionalized difference based on religion, ethnicity (as well as class) are not fixed, but are constantly reproduced, negotiated and redefined by those who claim them or attribute them to others, in order to cope with new circumstances, opportunities and challenges.

Makdisi's work on sectarianism in 19th century Ottoman Lebanon, one of the major sources of inspiration of my thesis, can be situated in the same critical tradition mentioned above. In his groundbreaking work, he argues that sectarianism is a relatively recent phenomenon and that the production of Lebanon's sects needs to be understood in terms of a "culture of sectarianism."[39] Differentiating Lebanese sectarianism from communalism in India "as a form of colonial knowledge transmitted by agents of the west to the inhabitants of

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[37] Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
[38] Ibid, pp. 4-6.
[39] Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, p. 16.

the region,"[40] he argues that sectarianism in Lebanon "is an expression of a new form of local politics and knowledge" that arose in a climate of transition and reform, where colonialism and Ottoman reforms played the most important roles.[41] He treats sectarianism as both a discourse and a practice. It is a practice that developed out of, and must be understood in the context of, 19th century Ottoman reform and European colonialism, which "transformed the social, political and economic significance of religion into a reified order wherein decontextualized religious identities alone defined individuals." It is a discourse that is "scripted as the Other to various competing Ottoman, European and Lebanese narratives of modernization."[42] He demonstrates that Maronite and Druze sectarianism in mid 19th century in Mount Lebanon cannot be understood independently of the intervention of the European colonial powers and Ottoman imperial reforms. He argues that it is a product of the colonial encounter in Lebanon as well as the marker of a restructured relationship between religion and modernity, namely the Tanzimat reforms.

The recent dossier by the Beirut-journal *al-Adab* is definitely a unique counterexample to the general neglect of the issue in the Syrian context. Yassin al-Haj Salih and Lu'ai Husain's brilliant pieces point out the role of the state and sectarian rule in the construction of sects in Syria. Husain argues that sectarianism is an ideological instrument of the state to maintain its tyranny over the society.[43] Al-Haj Salih demonstrates the role of the state-sponsored rumour, exaggeration, invention of novel histories and mystification ('*astara*), which serves to obstruct the conflicts within and emphasize the differences between the "sects."[44] He adds that the construction of collective memory, physical violence, discursive violence and scientific discourses help to this end. He argues that the state maintains a "sectarian balance" (*tawazun ta'ifi*)[45] between the communities in order to sustain its tyrannical rule over society. The state, accordingly, emphasizes the dissimilarities between the communities and obscures the commonalities within them. It appears as the arbiter between the communities seen as rivalling each other for power and access to material wealth.

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[40] Gyanandre Pandey, *The Construction of Colonialism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
[41] Ussama Makdisi, "Reconstructing the Nation-State: The Modernity of Sectarianism in Lebanon," *Middle East Report*, Minorities in the Middle East: Power and the Politics of Difference (July-September 1996), pp. 23-26 and 30.
[42] Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, p. 16.
[43] Lu'ai Husain, "al-Ta'ifiyya fi Suriyya: al-Sulta wa al-Nukhab wa al-Hulul al-Matruha" [Sectarianism in Syria: Power, Elites and Proposed Solutions], *al-Adab* 5-6 (2007), pp. 69-73.
[44] Yassin al-Haj Salih, "Sina'at al-Tawa'f: al-Ta'ifiyya bi Wasfiha Istratijiyyatu Saytaratin Siyasiyya" [The Construction of Sects: Sectarianism as a Strategy of Political Domination], *al-Adab* 1-2 (2007), pp. 38-44.
[45] Ibid., p. 41.

This thesis is inspired by the above-mentioned critical perspectives which view sectarianism neither as a colonial knowledge nor as a primordial belonging. Accordingly, I approach the ethno-religious identifications in Jazira as both a modern discourse and a complex social practice of invention, imagination and redefinition of communal, individual and political boundaries. The following chapters recover the agency of social actors as they have responded to colonial and national political, economic and social transformations. Hence, throughout I will "abandon" the notions of *nation*, *community*, *majority* and *minority* as categories of analysis and treat them, as Mc Dougall suggests, as a category of *practice*; in other words consider "not *what* 'identity' is—that is, what supposedly authoritative characterisations of 'the people' declare them to be—but *how* actual, specific socially and historically located people, and groups of people, themselves articulate their self-conceptions, their historical experiences and their place in society, how it is that they conceive of themselves, and the society within which they live, think and act, as constituting a nation"[46] or for the purposes of this thesis, as a sect.

In this sense, this thesis strives to make two major contributions to the historiographical tradition on Syria. First, it provides a social history of an understudied peripheral region by incorporating the experiences of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious groups, as opposed to those of the religious and political elites of their respective communities. It also situates Jazira and its inhabitants within the narrative framework of modern Syrian history *and* Republican Turkish history. Second, it suggests a political and sociological perspective on the resurgence of ethnic/religious difference at the end of the first decade of the 21st century. It points to the role of the *change* of power relations in the formation of the culture of sectarianism.

Memory

Memory-History

As mentioned in the preceding pages, the "present field" forced me to modify my original intention of writing a social history of the Turco-Syrian border to remembering the past and the re-construction of the community/sect/nation in Syria. Upon my arrival in the region, I had started interviewing people with the idea that the collective memory of particular historical events or formations could challenge the omissions, biases and generalizations of

[46] James Mc Dougall, "Introduction. History/culture/politics of the nation", p.3.

the official history.[47] The historical narratives of Jazirans from different socioeconomic, religious and ethnic belongings fulfilled this task of approaching a more "real" account of the "reality," yet the modes of rememberings and forgetting had overriding implications, especially in their relation to the present social processes and formations. Soon, I realized that the memories do not have the power to correct the failures and restore the state-centred historiography; yet, as Banerjee suggests, the task of remembering is not to mobilize the past for the present but to "remember the unfinished nature of the past."[48] This insight may be transferred over to the debates concerning the relationship between memory-history-violence, and memory and subjectivity.

At this point, I should clarify how I approach history and where the memories stand in relation to histories. In the rapidly growing literature on memory, there is a tendency to place the notions of history and memory as opposed to each other. Those who privilege the concept of memory over history argue that modern history-writing is a power-rich realm and excludes the memories of the Other under its pretensions to objectivity. On the other hand, there is a concern that memory is local, popular, disparate and subjective, and that it cannot replace history's claims to objective and collective truth under its "false pretension of authenticity."[49] Pierre Nora, being one of the champions of history–memory dichotomy, argues that "history is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and to destroy it."[50] The logic underlying the dichotomous view is that history is linear, universal and singular, whereas memory is circular, local and subjective. Against this nostalgic and idealist distinction, this thesis relies on Davis and Starn's argument that the opposition between memory and history should be countered by attending to their interdependence.[51] Or, to put it more poetically, modern history buries the dead and deals with the past as past, whereas memory engages with spectres to constantly and circularly re-establish the meaning of the present.[52]

The uneasy interdependence between history and memory becomes more obvious in the ways in which contentious historical incidents are configured and characterized in the

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[47] For an excellent study sharing the same perspective on memory, see Martin Evans, *The Memory of Resistance: French Opposition to the Algerian War* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).
[48] Prathama Banerjee, "Re-Presenting Pasts: Santals in Nineteenth-century Bengal," in Partha Chatterjee and Anjan Ghosh, eds., *History and the Present* (New Delhi, Permanent Black, 2002), p. 188; see also Partha Chatterjee, "Introduction: History and the Present", ibid., p. 18.
[49] Pierre Nora, "Les lieux de mémoires," *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), p. 9.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, "Introduction," *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), p. 5.
[52] Meltem Ahıska, "Occidentalism and Registers of Truth: The Politics of Archives in Turkey", *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 34 (2006), p. 21.

memories. The 1915 genocide is such an incident, thanks to the denialism on the part of the Turkish state and a large segment of the Turkish society. Chapter 2 will analyse the modes of remembering of 1915 in the Syrian Jazira, and demonstrate the role of the state politics of difference in the post-genocide context, the French mandate and the post-colonial regimes, in the articulation of "sectarian" *and* pro- or anti-regime narratives. The delimitation of the border and the French mandate period are not traumatic and violent events like the former, yet they are still contentious in more subtle ways in Syrian society.

I will employ the notion of post-memory throughout the thesis as the memories of the second and third generations who did not personally experince the state violence and other historical incidents mentioned in the thesis, but internalized the reportaire constructed by the state and the community establishment, as well as the memories transmitted by the older generations. Jaziran Christians' and Kurds' (post)memories, as well as the written memoires (authored by Syrian-Armenians, Syriacs or Kurds) verify the claim that history and memory are not two mutually exclusive epistemological areas, i.e. that memories do not stand in a vacuum, and that memory is not counter to history. Rather, memories obtain and secure social meaning only when they are embedded in a metanarrative—be it a hegemonic, dominant or anti-hegemonic discourse. Nevertheless, this does not imply that the oral narratives are necessarily limited to the established metanarratives. As will be demonstrated in the coming chapters, the post (memories) are not unavoidably a replica or a part of the nationalist or sectarian canon.

The ways in which 1915 and the French mandate regime in the Syrian Jazira are articulated in the memories confirm that the historical narratives lie at the intersection of a web of discourses—official Syrian-Arab nationalist, Armenian, Syriac and Kurdish nationalist, their Syrian sectarian versions, and their regional variations—which stand in unequal relationships to each other. This aspect becomes more evident in the Syrian Jazira since the Jazirans, both the Christians and the Kurds, form the most marginal factions of their respective communities, in social, cultural and linguistic terms. Labelled as *Kurdo-Chretiens* by the French in the immediate aftermath of their arrival in Syria in the mid-1920s, the Christians, in particular the Syriacs, endeavoured to get rid of the Kurdish label in several different ways, yet still their memories of the 1915 massacres in Turkey reveal contradictions, excesses or shortfalls with respect to the standard middle-class communal narratives. They were less exposed to the indoctrination of the nation-states and the disciplining tools of their respective sects than their fellows in Aleppo, Damascus and Beirut; thus they are still able to

merge different elements from otherwise incommensurable discourses—local, religious, national and so on—and can bear a more 'messy' and direct retrieval of their experiences.

In her work on the Armenian survivor memoires, Lorne Shirinian points out the commonality between the memories and the histories in terms of their use of culturally-informed literary techniques, conventions and characterizations—such as chronological time, description and dialogue. In particular, she compares the narrative voices in the History and in the memoires that are capable of linking and binding together the chaotic events of the catastrophe, thereby imposing order.[53] The common plot structure and the chain of events between the Histories and the survivor memoirs are more obvious compared to the more 'messy' and less 'coherent' memories. The oral narratives do not manifest a neatly made introduction or prologue in the manner of a statement of intentions, but still the memories are encoded with political and cultural discourses which make sense of personal and public pasts. While the history and the official memoirs are endowed with a rational, analytic and closed narrative, the oral accounts are more flexible and less coherent.

Memory-Present-Community

As the memories form one of the sources that this dissertation employs in social analysis, an elaboration on memory as a scholarly notion and the relationship between memory and subjectivity is necessary. The following section undertakes this task.

In his classic study *The Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs argues that individual memories are always constructed in dialogue with our social surroundings and can only exist within a social context. Later scholars have also taken up his theme, arguing that just as history is produced in a specific historical context, memories are made possible by the structures of collective/social memory.[54] Furthermore, not only remembering but also forgetting has a communal aspect. Silence and forgetting are not just lacks; rather, they are present absences or negative spaces which shape what is remembered. The forgotten is as much shared as what is remembered.

As a result of the post-1980s' constructivist turn in the discipline of history, it is now widely accepted that there is neither a fixed past waiting to be retrieved nor a fixed and homogenous collective subject that does the remembering. Several scholars have worked to

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[53] Lorne Shirinian, "Survivor Memoirs of the Armenian Genocide as Cultural History," in Richard Hovannisian, (ed.) *Remembrance and Denial*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), p. 168.
[54] John Urry, "How Societies Remember the Past," in Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfem (eds.), *Theorizing Museums* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 50.

demonstrate the extent to which images of the past are tied up with contemporary politics, showing that the 'past' is a cultural construct made in the present, and thus subject to various cotemporary interests.

Similarly, memory is not something we have but something we produce or act out as individuals sharing a culture. As John Shotter puts it: "remembering is constituted by the particular discourses of which it is a part, and it is always occasioned by and subordinated to the socially constituted needs and struggles of individuals and the social discourses through which they are expressed."[55] More concretely, there is a 'tacit agreement' about what is to be remembered or what is to be forgotten. The needs of the present have a crucial role in determining which memories are to be forgotten and which will be retained. People are less concerned with the historicity or chronology of events than with how the past relates to their present lives.

In connection with the present-ness of the past and the past-ness of the present, the mutually constitutive relation between subjectivity, identity and memory has also been elaborated from different perspectives. Various scholars have explained how memory work is tied to social reproduction in a diffused way as individual memories of historical events and practices are socialized and transmitted, preserved or silenced. They argued that social memory is essential to the formation of social meaning and, similarly, remembering is integral to the constitution of subjectivity. Renan has pointed to the centrality of "collective forgetting" in the creation of a nation.[56] Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm have advanced similar arguments with regards to the emergence and sustaining of nationalist ideologies, demonstrating how the links of nationality are imagined through an idiom of kinship and how the nation becomes one family, one eternal body.[57] Critical Turkish and Israeli scholars have shown how the past is reconstructed in particular ways to serve the interests of oppressive and exclusionist state ideologies which appeal to society in the process of forming hegemony. John Gillis reminds us how the notion of identity depends on the notion of memory since "the core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely a sense of sameness over time, is sustained by remembering and what is remembered is defined by

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[55] John Shotter, "The Social Construction of Remembering and Forgetting," in David Middleton and Derek Edwards eds., *Collective Remembering* (London: Sage, 1990), pp. 120-138.
[56] Ernest Renan, "What Is a Nation?" in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 11, 19.
[57] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); and Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and with Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

identity."[58] He proposes that "identities and memories are not things we think *about*, but things we think *with*. As such they have no existence beyond our politics, our social relationships and our histories."[59]

The psychologist Frederic Bartlett is another significant figure exploring the relationship between social structures and an individual's memory. He argued that what we remember is shaped by "schemas."[60] The scholarship that has developed around his ideas provides us with important insights relevant to this study, stressing as it does the role of feeling and affect as key features of how people remember, and highlighting the importance of conventionalization, a process whereby "cultural symbols take on recognized properties through assimilation, simplification and elaboration as new experiences are assimilated into a pre-existing scheme." [61] Consequently, the constructed past is itself constructive of the collectivity and vice versa: the constitution of individuals as subjects goes hand-in-hand with the continuous creation of the scarce past.[62]

These social constructionist approaches demonstrate how remembering (or forgetting) is intertwined with socio-political processes, and foreground the role of the present in the reconstruction of the past. However, such theories need to be qualified; otherwise there is the danger of falling into extreme relativism and political nihilism. First of all, the notion of construction does not imply the existence of a vacuum in which an endless number of pieces can be put together in various possibilities, nor that there is an infinite number of free-floating truths in the society. On the contrary, as Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook argue in their critical piece on the Subaltern Studies collective, "it is only in the light of some conception of a dominant cultural logic or hegemonic system that resistance, emancipation, or difference can be meaningfully identified or measured at all."[63]

Jeffrey K. Olick's valuable works on German politics and history nuances the extreme constructivist stance by emphasizing the interdependency between the past and the present. Olick does not treat the construction of the past as a purely dependent variable but argues that "the reworking of the past is not merely incidental to those interests: it is a necessary part of

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[58] John Gillis, "Introduction" in idem, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 1.
[59] Ibid. p. 5.
[60] Sir Frederic Charles Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932, repr. 1995). p. 199.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past, Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), p. 16.
[63]Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook, "After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism and Politics in the Third World," in Vinayak Chatervedi (ed.), *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* (New York: Verso, 2000), p. 199.

their expression and constitution."[64] Referring to Michael Stürmer's famous statement during the German Historian's dispute of 1985-86, that "the future belongs to those who fill memory, coin concepts and interpret the past," Olick argues that new images of the past *also* allow for the generation of new power positions.[65]

Another reservation regarding the social constructivist theories mentioned above is the underlying functionalist assumption that memory is evoked at times of need. However, in Freud's words, despite the functionalist demands of the ego, "certain habits or practices might indicate a displaced reaction to previously experienced painful events."[66] According to Freud, all kinds of memories are stored in the unconscious, while the ego keeps itself from painful or conflictual memories by means of repression. In other words, the painful past can easily live on, unwanted, in spite of present needs, while the ego tries to keep the relevant memories at a distance. Freud privileges the ahistorical psychodynamic forces in explaining memory, while the social scientists incorporating psychoanalysis into social science have historicized the unconscious. What I find useful for understanding Jazirans' memories is this strand, which theorizes the "unspoken world of memory that might implicitly structure some aspects of social life"[67] or, in the words of Michael Lambek and Paul Antze, "what we commemorate in the patterns we repeat." [68] The concept of the "unofficial conscious," proposed by the Marxist writer Valentin Volosinov, might be useful in understanding how the Autonomy Movement in the French Jazira (1936-1939), as will be elaborated in detail in Chapter 4, structures the present through forgetting. Volonisov argues that the psyche is a "social entity filled with ideological signs, a product of continual interaction between it and the outer world."[69] He argues that the unconscious is not fundamentally different from the conscious, rather the difference between them lies in the "degree of ideological elaboration," and that the unconscious is guided by inner speech. The unconscious is a relatively unelaborated ideological realm because it is not yet completely expressed in words, and thus leaves thought unfinished and incomplete.[70] In the case of the memories of dissidence of the Autonomy Movement in the late 1930s in Jazira, the "unconscious official"—what Michael Taussig calls

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[64] Jeffrey K. Olick, "Official Memory in German Politics" in idem, (ed.), *States of Memory, Continuities, Conflicts and Transformations in National Retrospection* (Duke: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 261.
[65] Ibid, p. 261.
[66] Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (NY: Norton, 1965).
[67] Jennifer Cole, *Forget Colonialism? Sacrifice and the Art of Memory in Madagascar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 27.
[68] Michael Lambek and Paul Antze, "Introduction: Forecasting Memory" in idem, (eds.), *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. xxvii.
[69] Valentin Volosinov, *Freudanism, a Marxist Critique*, (New York: Academic Press, 1976), p. 76. I was introduced to Volosinov through Jennifer Cole's *Forget Colonialism.*
[70] Volosinov,1976, p. 76.

"the implicit social knowledge"[71]—namely the unarticulated form of knowledge or "what slips in and out of consciousness," is not necessarily expressed in embodied practices, but in the continuously repeating narratives of local history.

Extreme constructivism usually underestimates how the past, in Appadurai's words, "is a scarce resource" and how "the representations of the past are constrained by cultural models of what constitutes a compelling historical narrative as well as the raw materials available for construction."[72] In other words, not only does memory have a history, but the historical frameworks that we think with or employ to understand past social actions are themselves social and historical constructions. Similar to the idea that experience is not directly related to the lived reality but to the discourses that construct that reality, as post-structuralist feminist scholars have demonstrated,[73] different "temporalities" of particular perspectives underwrite the narrated memories through which the self, community and the Other are imagined and re-imagined. My analysis of the production of different historical narratives of 1915 and the French mandate years by different groups and their particular "temporal schemes" will reveal, in the words of Edward Bruner, that "the present is given meaning in terms of that anticipated present we call the future, and the former present which we call the past."[74]

The most constructive and politically relevant criticism comes from Michel-Rolph Trouillot. In his excellent book *Silencing the Past*, also one of the main inspirations for this dissertation; he focuses on the role of power and power relations in the formation of certain historical narratives and the silencing of others in the history of Haiti. He tracks the power in the process and production of narratives about Haiti as revealed through History, and demonstrates that power is indeed constitutive of history. Inspired by his work, I also attempt to "track the power" through various moments in the rememberings: 1915, the early colonial period and the controversial 1936-39 period. As the dual problematic of this thesis suggests, in my analysis of Jazirans' memories I will interrogate the colonial genealogy of the modes of Jazirans' remembrances as well as the underlying power relations embedded within them in the present. In my analyses of these memories, I intend on the one hand to historicize the memories, and on the other hand I display the present-ness of the memories in relation to the

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[71] Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: Chicago University Press1987), p. 366.
[72] Arjun Appadurai, "The Past as a Scarce Resource", *Man* 16, 2 (1982), pp. 10-19.
[73] Joan Scott, "Experience," in Judith Butler and Joan Scott (eds.) *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 22-40. Experience of an event, or history, is dependent on the terms that the symbolic order offers. It needs these terms to transform the living through the event into an experience of the event.
[74] Edward Bruner, "Ethnography as Narrative," in Victor W. Turner and Edward Bruner (ed.), *The Anthropology of Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), pp. 142 and 139-155.

hegemonic discourses—that is, the official Arab nationalist and communal(ist)/nationalist discourses.

Trouillot argues that silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments although in diverse and particular ways: "the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final stance)."[75] Ana Maria Alonso calls the attempt to appropriate popular histories "culinary techniques" undertaken by the hegemonic power in order to sustain and advance its hegemony or domination.[76] In Syria, both the official nationalist and communitarian hegemonic discourses appropriate the 'undisciplined popular memories' of past events not simply through repression, but more through collectivizing, channelling and harnessing the multiplicity of the experiences and memories. They link the seemingly dispersed fragments to a national/communal story, so that the fate of every citizen is directly tied to the nation/community and to the undertakings of the ancestors of the nation.[77]

However, the people I interviewed did not simply echo the dominant versions: still, this does not mean that they have a pure and authentic memory of the events. They are caught up in what Gramsci calls the subaltern "common sense": unlike the relatively coherent and systematic discourses that issue from official sources, common sense is "ambiguous, contradictory, multiform and strangely composite."[78] Besides this, however, they always work under the challenges of "counter-memory" which, according to Foucault, is "the residual or the resistant strains that withstand official versions of historical continuity."[79] Counter-memories may haunt the established truths of the official nationalist or communal ideologies establishment in different ways; thus, oral histories might provide an *alternative* register of reality which has the potential to produce alternative narratives. In the Syrian Jazira, both the genocide-survivor Christians and the Kurds rework the Turkish and Syrian unofficial secret memories of different historical incidents respectively, and turn the personal tragedies into narratives, thereby repositioning themselves in the past, constructing a sense of continuity and

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[75] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, pp 26-27.
[76] Ana Maria Alonso, "The Effects of Truth: Re-Presentations of the Past and the Imagining of the Community", *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1, no. 1 (March 1988), p. 44. She singles out three techniques: naturalization, departicularization, and idealization.
[77] Swedenburg argues that the nationalization of popular memories is a significant tool in creating and consolidating the dominant middle class state ideology. Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*: *The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 2003).
[78] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), p. 324.
[79] Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 139-64.

restoring a form of dignity. Yet these narratives always need to be interrogated by the following questions: who is doing the remembering, where, with what consequences, in which context and against what.[80] Class, ethnicity, religion, gender, political stance and the history of the individual/group appear as important factors determining the end result. Such an inquiry of how memory works is central to an understanding of social life.[81]

Based on the above insights, this thesis aims to reveal the role of re-membering/forgetting/silencing in the construction of community in the Syrian Jazira, guided by the conviction that unravelling the process of collective remembering/forgetting is, in a way, uncovering the hegemonic discourses and practices that are sustained through collective memory: that is, the official Arab nationalist, Turkish nationalist, Syriac/Armenian sectarian and Syrian-Kurdish nationalist discourses. It also aims to reconstruct the colonial period in the French Jazira and demonstrate the "scarcity of the past."

Memory-Violence-Community

Despite the constitutive relationship between memories and the History, the memories have a quality that the History has lost. One of these is the relation between history and violence. In his work on the memories of partition in India, Gyanandre Pandey demonstrates that in mainstream histories and memories, violence withstands the structured text mostly as a residue, as a side-effect of the meaningful and coherent narrative. [82] Violence is not given a necessarily rational meaning in the oral narratives by the group in question. It stands as something unreasonable, or as something which exceeds the limits of reason. Chapter 1 will set out how "violence" per se means *the very event itself* in the imagery of the subalterns who were subject to that violence.

Violence studies and trauma theory have demonstrated the relationship between memory, violence and structures of power. They have pointed to the centrality of the past trauma in the meaning-production and shaping of the present and future lives of the survivor, and acknowledge the extremely interruptive effect of the traumatic events in people's lives, including the ways in which people make sense of and find meaning in their new lives. They emphasize the present-ness of the past traumas, and their role in shaping the present. In the words of Flora A. Keshgegian, "the past trauma does not manifest itself in current lives

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[80] Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, "Introduction," *Representations* 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (1989), p. 3.
[81] Ahıska, "Occidentalism and Registers of Truth", 2006, p. 21.
[82] Gyanandre Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001

simply as reminder and remainder, but as present reality. The trauma, even though it is not fully articulated or even recognized as trauma may become the guiding force of identity and meaning formation."[83]

The studies that are concerned with the relation between memory, trauma and identity have shown how sectarian identities are constructed and reified in the course of violent historical struggle.[84] They have indicated how the sense of threat generated by the traumatic memory reinforces and intensifies the fears of danger and lack of safety, and thus strengthens the memories of violence. Several case-studies from different parts of the world have demonstrated how violence and its (post) memories solidify and idealize inherently fragmentary and unstable ethnic, religious and national communities. These studies have increased our knowledge about the political and social articulations and dynamics of violence among the victims in their post-violence lives, and showed how remembering violence furthers this process and functions as the generator of a genuine past giving an identity to the past and a unity to the community.

The constitutive outside in the process of reification of ethnic, national or religious belongings is the absence of a genuine confrontation with the past violence, which in a way suggests that the reasons underlying the past violence still prevail. In the Jaziran context, it is the symbolic violence of the Turkish state, as revealed in the prevailing Turkish denialism and assimilationist polices, which makes the traumatic memory of Jaziran Christians' and Kurds' resistant to integration or dissolution into the linear understanding of time. Politics of difference of the Syrian-Ba'th state also plays a role in this process. Seemingly paradoxically, the memories of past violence are manipulated and historical parallels are drawn between the present and the past conflicts.

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[83] Flora A. Keshgegian, "Finding a Place Last Night: Armenian Genocidal Memory in Diaspora" in Oren Baruch Stier and J. Shawn Landres (eds.), *Religion, Violence, Memory and Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p .102.

[84] Jonathan Boyarin, (ed.), *Remapping Memory: The Politics of Time Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1994); Joanne Rappaport, *The Politics of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Richard Werbner, *Memory and the Postcolony* (London: Zed Books, 1998).

Chapter 1 The Politics of Memory in the Syrian Jazira: Alien Infiltrators, Autochthones, and Loyal Subjects

> The past will have been worked through only when the causes of what happened then have been eliminated. Only because the causes continue to exist does the captivating spell of the past remain to this day unbroken.[85]

As mentioned in the Introduction, one must realize that the Jazirans' sense of themselves and their communal belongings cannot be discussed in isolation from how Jazirans were and have been conceived in mainstream Turkish nationalist discourse, French colonial imagery and the Syrian Ba'th ideology. The Jaziran-Christians are the 'blamed victims'[86] of Turkey and appear as the '(outsider) beneficiaries' of the French mandate, and the 'privileged communities' of the post-colonial Syrian regimes in the Syrian non-Christian common sense. The Jaziran Kurds, however, were excluded from the Turkish nationalist project, approached hesitantly by the French, and stigmatized as "alien infiltrators" under the Ba'th rule. Jazirans' sense of history is overshadowed by the current sociopolitical situations in Jazira, Turkey and the region. The unequal sectarian rule and the Kurdish issue continue to haunt the Syrians against a background of authoritarian populism, increasing Syrian neo-liberalism and sectarian violence in the region. [87] Turkey maintains its denialist attitude towards 1915 and perpetuates the Kurdish problem.

This chapter will focus on the Syrian part of this multi-layered complex picture. It will describe the social, political and economic background which is deeply implicated in Jaziran Kurds' and Christians' subjectivity, thus their various modes of remembering and forgetting. The chapter is formed of three parts: The first focuses on the pre-genocide life of the the French Jaziran refugees. The second sets out the main lines of the French mandate rule in Syria as it is formative in the transformation of the notions of self and community in Jazira. A separate section here is devoted to the presentation of Damascus/Beirut-centred colonial politics in Syria, simply because the history of Jazira, as a peripheral(ized) region, is directly linked to the central politics. The third part of this chapter is concerned with the ethnic and religious issues in post-independence Syria, in particular the Ba'th period.

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[85] Theodor Adorno, "The Meaning of Working Through the Past," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 103.
[86] The expression of "blamed victims" refers to the Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens, *Blaiming the Victims*: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question, (London: Verso, 1988).
[87] I borrow the term "authoritarian populism" from Stuart Hall, "Authoritarian Populism: A Reply to Jessop et al.," *NLR* 151 (May–June 1985).

Still, what is more revealing in terms of the relation between the present-day subjectivities and the past is to trace how memories are informed by the *changing* power structures, relations and hegemonic discourses throughout the post-Ottoman phases of the Jaziran communities' lives, rather than taking the French mandate or the Ba'th periods in isolation from each other. Accordingly, below I trace the *differences* in state–society relations and politics of difference (vis-à-vis the minority issue) through the Ottoman/Turkish Republic, the French mandatory rule and the post-independence Arab nationalist regimes.

Clearly, different sets of events have been crucial in shaping Jaziran Christian and Kurdish subjectivities. The critical juncture in the shaping of the Kurdish subjectivity is the establishment of Ba'th rule and the onset of oppressive Arab nationalist policies, rather than the regime change to the post-colonial period. Accordingly, the suffering under the Turkish nationalist violence and later the Ba'th rule are conjoined to each other, while the lowly institutionalized nation-state structure under the French mandate is conceived as a "break," as revealed through a narrative of a (still enduring) "history of injustice." In the Christian establishment discourse, however, it is the Christians' very arrival in French-Syria, with the military dictatorship of Adib Shishakli and the United Arab Republic (1958–1961) as the two "short-breaks," from "freedom" that are depicted as more noteworthy changes. It is this periodization of the Christian establishment that leads to a dichotomy of "pre-Syrian injustice vs. post-Syrian justice" in their historical narratives. The inequality accruing from the "state-controlled favouritism" of the Ba'th state vis-à-vis the Christians and the politics of disenfranchisement and disempowerment towards the Jaziran Kurds informs the domestic/regional political and ideological struggle between the Kurds and the Syriacs of Jazira.

The following section is devoted to an overview of the place of origin, the "old home" in modern-day Turkey that the majority of the Jazirans originate from.

The Home

This section outlines the social history of the Diyarbekir, Mardin and Siirt countryside starting from the second half of the 19th century up until 1930s, the region from where the majority of the Jaziran refugees originate. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 2, remembering 1915 and the pre-genocide world evokes religious/sectarian difference and rupture. The following section, which is mostly compiled from second-hand sources where Ugur Ungor's

brilliant work stand out as the most utilized, intends to demystify the sectarian/nationalist discourses intrinsic to the Jazirans' (post) memories about the social and economic relations at "home" that was left back in Turkey. The account below will undertake this task through singling out the *impure* and *relational* history of the Jaziran Christians and Kurds prior to their exodus to French-Syria. It will to portray how the borders of ethnic and religious identifications used to be blurred, and how religious divisions existed as an organic part of the bigger community of peasants and small artisans living in the countryside under a loose, yet hierarchical tribal and semi-tribal organization.

Armenians who found refuge in the French Jazira are survivors from the 1915 genocide who were able to stay alive through 1915 either in their home towns under the protection of their Kurdish aghas, or, where their villages were burned or wiped out, in a proximate village or town usually populated by other Christian groups. Originally peasants from the towns and villages of the Reşkotan area of the Gharzan Plain such as Bişêrî/Qubîn (today: Gercüş), Zercil (today: Danalı), Farqin (today: Silvan), Bolunt (today: Bilek) and Xaznamir (today: İnpınar), they had been coexisting with the Kurds and living under one of the Kurdish tribes of the region (Reşkotan and Elikan tribes of Gharzan region; or Sinakan or Reman of Bişêrî region). The Jaziran Syriacs and Christians from other denominations such as Chaldeans and Protestants were either from the city centres of Diyarbekir, Mardin, Cizre, or Derik, or were from the villages of Tour Abdin, Midyat, Mzizax, or Qal'at Mar'a.

Although very little information exists about this region in the pre-genocide period, several parts of the Diyarbekir, Siirt and Mardin provinces were home to a mixed population with Kurds, Arabs and several Christian groups from different sects as well as Jews and Yezidis. Kurdish tribes dominated the region socially and politically. As Bruinessen states, "the Kurdish tribes incorporated both the non-tribal Kurds and Christians into semi-feudal structures of control where they, most notably Hevêrkan, had integrated Christian and Yezidi notables who were on good terms with the rest of the Kurdish elites in the tribe."[88] The incorporation was not always peaceful, though. Kevorkian and Paboudjian relate that the Armenians of Bisheri (Bişêrî) were overcome by nomadic Kurdish tribes in the 15th century, and a part of them converted to Islam around the 18th century.[89]

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[88] Martin van Bruinessen, "Constructions of ethnic identity in the late Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey: the Kurds and their Others", http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/constructions_of_ethnic_identity.htm.
[89] R. H. Kevorkian and P. B. Paboudjian, *Les Armeniens Dans l'Empire Ottoman a La Veille Du Genocide* (Paris, Editions d'Art et d'Histoire ARHIS, 1992), p. 400.

Armenian peasants usually lived loosely under a Kurdish tribe, and had a certain amount of autonomy. The traditional division of labour was mainly inter-religious between the Kurdish peasants and the Christian peasants, such that the Armenians worked as small artisans such as blacksmiths, saddlers, weavers and potters, or as sharecroppers, while the Kurdish peasants mostly specialized in animal breeding for other Kurdish peasants in the region.[90] As conveyed in the remembrances of Kurdophone Armenian peasants of Bisheri (Bişêrî) and Farqin, in the towns in the Reşkotan and Hazax districts and the Xerzan (Gharzan) valley from where most of the Jaziran Armenians originate, Christians and Muslims (Kurds) shared a common culture, a common accent, a common respect for agricultural cycles. They were bound by similar hierarchies and submitted to the same aghas. They respected, acknowledged, and sometimes participated in each other's religious feasts. The urban population of Mardin and Diyarbekir was involved in regional trade. Partnership between the Armenian and/or Syriac merchants and the Kurdish or Arab tribal aghas, who often had a residence in the city centre, was a norm rather than an exception.

19th century travel writers had already written regarding the social, cultural and economic intermingling, the tribal equality and political alliances between the Assyrians of the Hakkari region and the Kurds, that they could hardly be distinguished socio-economically or socially and culturally from the neighbouring Kurds.[91] Agha Petros (1880–1931) wrote in his memories that "entre les Assyriennes et les Kurdes, il y a seulement une différence dans la religion; c'est à dire que celui qui se convertit à l'Islam est appelé Kurde."[92] Pierre Rondot, a senior French officer who conducted extensive research on the peoples of the French Jazira in 1920s pointed to the ethno-religious division of labour among the Kurds, Christians and Jews in the Kurdish tribes of the region and stated that "most of the tasks that needed handicraft work in Kurdish tribes are undertaken by the Armenians and Jews who have penetrated into the tribal life or lived in proximity and excelled in dying, currying (of leather or metal), or treatment of metals"[93] Although we should treat with caution his claim that "le kurde musulman ne caractérise pas ses voisins par la différence de religion: il trouve tel chrétien très

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[90] Taken from Tachjian, *La France en Cilicie et en Haute Mésopotamie* , p. 175, footnote 303. CADN, Syrie-Liban, 1er versement, no.1065, lettre no. 4204/DZ du colonel Callasi, Délègue Adjoint du Haut Commissaire pour le Sandjak de Deir ez Zor au délègue du Haut-Commissaire á Damas, 24 October 1928, Deir ez Zor, p.1. Thomas H. Greenshields, "The Settlement of Armenian refugees in Syria and Lebanon, 1915–1939", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Durham, 1978, p. 262.

[91] Edward William Charles Noel, *Diary of Major Noel on Special Duty in Kurdistan*, (Basra: n.p, 1920).

[92] Agha Petros, Mémoires, p. 526 and 323 taken from Pierre Rondot, "Origine et Caractère Ancestraux du Peuplement Assyrien en Haute Djézireh Syrienne, Esquisse d'une étude de la vie tribale", *BEO* 41-42 (1989-90), pp. 92

[93]Pierre Rondot, "Les Tribus Montagnardes de l'Asie Anterieure, Quelques Aspects Sociaux des Populations Kurdes et Assyriennes", *BEO*, 6 (1935-1936), p. 30.

différent de lui, et tel autre tout semblable à lui"[94] (A Muslim Kurd does not characterise his neighbours by religious difference: he finds one Christian very different than himself, another very similar to himself), it is still significant in revealing that religion was not the *sole* marker of identity, encapsulating all other allegiances.

Bruinessen's argument is relevant at this point. He argues that religious difference made sense *when* it intersected with other more secular belongings, the most significant of which was the tribal belonging.

> "Perhaps the most important boundary of all … was that between the tribal and non-tribal populations. The Muslim–Christian boundary was especially sharp where it coincided with that separating tribesmen and non-tribal peasants or craftsmen. Where Christians were tribally organized and militarily strong, as the Nestorians of Hakkari and the Jacobites of the Tour 'Abdin still were for most of the 19th century, they were treated as equals by Kurdish tribesmen. The non-tribal populations of the region included speakers of Kurdish, Zaza and Gurani as well as Armenian, Aramaic, Arabic and perhaps Turkish, and there were Sunni and Alevi Muslims among them as well as Christians. The tribesmen made no sharp ethnic distinctions among these non-tribal groups, referring to them by the blanket term of *ra`yat* ("subjects"), by slightly more precise terms such as *feleh* (for Christian peasants, especially Armenians) and *kurmanc* (for Muslim peasants in northern Kurdistan), or by terms of local scope that differed from region to region. The tribesmen referred to themselves simply as '*ashiret* ("tribe") or as Kurd."[95]

In a similar vein, Yves Ternon conceived the relations between the Kurds and the Christians that of "des conflits, de vengeances á assouvir, mais aussi de dettes á payer et de paroles á respecter."[96]

In Mardin, the Syriac and Chaldean villages were dispersed all over the region, with the exception of the Tour 'Abdin mountains, stretching east from Mardin in present-day Turkey, which may be considered as the once-core and the most densely populated Syriac region: this latter region is where the majority of the Jaziran Syriac population originates from. By the beginning of the 20th century, several tribes in the Tour 'Abdin region had Yezidi as well as Muslim segments (which probably was due to the gradual conversion of Yezidi tribes to Islam).[97] This generally meant that protection was given to Christians in return for their delivery of labour, goods and animals to the agha or the tribal chief. Unlike the Nestorians of the Hakkari region, the Syriacs of the Tour 'Abdin region were not tribally

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[94] Ibid. p. 6.
[95] Martin van Bruinessen, "Constructions of ethnic identity in the late Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey: the Kurds and their Others", http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/constructions_of_ethnic_identity.htm.
[96] Yves Ternon, *Mardin, 1915: Anatomie pathologique d'une destruction* (Centre d'Historie Arménienne Contemporaine: Paris, 2002), p. 178.
[97] Van Bruinessen, "Constructions of ethnic identity."

organized.[98] However, they had longstanding affiliations with Kurdish tribes, who acted as their protectors and demanded taxes in return.

Before the 1920s, Christians and Muslims in Tour ‘Abdin had established a considerable degree of economic integration, regularly buying and selling from each other. Trading was interwoven in complex ways with the political structures, as will be mentioned below. To secure his stock from thieves, for instance, a Christian trader would ally himself by payment to a powerful local agha. Sometimes poorer Kurds or Yezidis were also employed by Christians as tenants. Generally, the Syriacs express pride in their skills as craftsmen, traders and agriculturalists, and speak of their economic superiority to Muslims: although some local Christians are no better off than the local Kurds in the towns and villages, there are many more Christian landholders than Kurdish ones in Tour ‘Abdin.[99]

However, this should not lead us to think that there was peaceful coexistence, no religious discrimination, and no violence between communities of different faith in the region—between Muslim Kurds and local Christian communities on the one hand, and between different sects of Christian communities on the other—before 1915.[100] Many Christian (Syriac or Armenian) village histories relate the deliberate invitation of an influential Kurdish family whose presence in the village would guarantee protection. Armbruster argues that “protection is a euphemism under these conditions as there is no way to cope without protection.” [101]Almost all the villages in Tour ‘Abdin relied on a Kurdish agha who belonged to one of the two rival Kurdish tribal confederations: Hevêrkan or Dekşuri.[102] Factionalism among the Syriacs would continue under different tribal sub-belongings in different localities. In Tour ‘Abdin, the rivalry was between the Çelebi and Battê and the Hamke and İsmailo. In Midyat, for instance, the Syriacs were divided among the Mehmedo and Hajo. The same factionalism was played out as a rivalry between the DP (Democrat Party) and the RPP (Republican People’s Party) under the Turkish Republic after 1950s.[103]Any conflict between these tribes or political factions would directly affect the

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[98] Pierre Rondot, “Origine et Caractère Ancestraux ”, pp. 65-111.
[99] Heidemarie Armbruster, *Securing the Faith: Syrian Christians in Turkey and Germany* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2000), p. 15.
[100] For a very rare account of inter-Christian relations, see Levon der Bedrossian, *‘Alaqat Armaniyya wa Suryaniyya* [The Armenian-Syriac Relations] (Aleppo: Dar al-Raha, 1999).
[101] Armbruster, *Securing the Faith*, p. 21.
[102] E. Turan, *Evolutions et recompositions identitaires des populations syriaques* (Mémoire de DEA, EHESS, Paris, 1997), pp. 32-36.
[103] Private conversation with Hanna-Beth Sawoce. See also Neşe Özgen, “Devlet, Sınır Aşiret: Aşiretin Etnik Bir Kimlik Olarak Yeniden İnşası”, *Toplum ve Bilim*, 108 (1997), pp. 239-61.

Syriacs in Tour ‘Abdin. [104] However, it would be misleading to write these factionalisms into the Islam–Christianity war and treat religious difference as holding the sole monopoly over one’s economic, political, social and cultural position in this rural region from where the Syrian Jazirans originate.

It may be argued, then, that similar to their counterparts in several areas of the Ottoman Empire such as Mount Lebanon and Albania especially before the 19th century Ottoman reforms, belonging to a religious group was intertwined with a number of secular identities such as family, village, town and tribe. Local communities did not necessarily identify themselves nationally or in decontextualized religious terms. As Ussama Makdisi argues with respect to the case of intercommunal relations in Mount Lebanon before the Ottoman reforms and Western domination, “the local communities subsumed their religious identities within a political and public space that accommodated differences of faith.” [105] Not that religious affiliation did not matter in the Diyarbekir-Mardin region: it definitely mattered; but, again in the words of Makdisi, “religious affiliations were enmeshed in other competing allegiances and discourses of obedience.” [106]That is to say, religious difference existed and was reproduced through different means, the most significant of which were family and marital relations; but religion was not the *sole* identity marker into which all other competing identities were subsumed.

The perspectives mentioned above, which allow us to bring “secular allegiances” into the picture, were obviously absent among the Catholic missionaries or the orientalist French colonial officers. Dominican missionaries who were active in the French Jazira starting from the 1930s were confused by the cultural and linguistic intermingling between different ethno-religious groups of the region. Disappointed by the Kurdophone Christians of the region, they viewed them as a heretical and superstitious people who had diverted from true Christianity under “Islamic oppression.”[107] An observation by Raymond O’Zoux, one of the most fervent supporters of the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon, is significant in revealing the colonial outlook on the religious practices of the locals of the region:

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[104] Abdurrahim Özmen, *Tur Abdin Süryanıleri Örneğinde Etno-Kültürel Sınırlar* (Unpublished PhD thesis, Ankara University, 2006). http://kulturelcogulcugundem.com/images/Tur%20Abdin%20S%C3%BCryanileri.pdf?PHPSESSID=91ecd87b5d912054c15442cce888e905.
[105] Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, p. 29.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Several reports on Jazira drafted by the Dominican missionaries in Jazira embrace this colonial-orientalist view about the Christians in the Middle East.

> "Un feux curieux á signaler c'est la voile de "tcharchaf"[108] que portent les femmes Catholiques de la campagne ; c'est dit-on, par peur des injures et des coups des fanatiques musulmans: peut-être faut-il voir plutôt ici une des très nombreuses empreintes de l'islamisme sur les populations surremises longtemps, au droit canonique. Un autre signe de ces survivances musulmanes, c'est l'habitude conservée des églises sans sièges avec des tapis ou des nattes. La fidele copiant le musulman qui entre a la mosquée, ôte ses chaussures et s'assied à la Turque. Il y a un règlement draconien pour les femmes : dans les églises—même celles des villes—prés du chœur se tiennent les hommes, puis viennent les enfants des écoles, enfin les femmes sont reléguées au fond de la nef. Le rideau qui est encore conservé devant l'autel ne sert plus qu'à le protéger de la poussière, en dehors de tout service religieux."[109]

The Long 19th Century

The most significant blow to the above-mentioned tribal structure came with the authority crisis in Ottoman Kurdistan, caused by the Ottoman state's centralizing measures against the autonomous Kurdish emirates in the early 19th century.[110] The Ottoman defeat in the Russian war (1877–1878) and the ensuing treaty of Berlin (1878) increased the fear and discontent in the Ottoman state and among the local Kurdish population. The Kurds around the towns of Cizre, Midyat, Silvan and Nusaybin, and the tribes around Gharzan and Bisheri (Bişêrî) were reported to be oppressing the local Christian population. The disposal of the furnishings of churches in Siirt; Kurdish notables' tax collection by force from the Christian villagers; some Christians working against other Christians: these and other incidents were set out in the reports of the Ottoman investigation commissions headed by Bekir Pasha.[111] The occupation or the illegal acquisition of Armenian lands by the Kurds around Muş, Diyarbekir, Bitlis and Van was another significant issue causing conflict between the two groups.[112] The experience of the Balkan war and the treaty of Berlin—in which the Ottoman Empire lost some two-fifths of its territory and one-fifth of its population—had persuaded Abdulhamid II of the threats posed to the empire's survival.[113] In order to reinforce state authority, he sought to promote a pan-Islamic bond with the non-Turkish Muslim communities, particularly the

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[108] Charchaf (Tr: çarşaf) is an outer garment covering a woman from head to foot designed to hide her body from the view of men.
[109] Raymond O'Zoux, *Les Etats du Levant sous Mandat Français* (Paris: Larose, 1931), pp. 34-35.
[110] For the semi-independent character of the early nineteenth-century Kurdish emirates, see Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Sheikh, State* (London: Zed Books, 1992), pp. 133-204; on the semi-independence of the Armenians of Sassun and Zeitun, see T. Hoffman and G. Koutcharian, "The History of Armenian-Kurdish Relations in the Ottoman Empire", *Armenian Review* 39, no. 4 (1986), p. 5.
[111] Musa Çadırcı, *Tanzimat Doneminde Anadolu Kentlerinin Sosyal ve Ekonomik Yapilari* (Ankara: Turk Tarih Kurumu Yayinlari, 1992), pp. 411-85.
[112] Cited by Garo Sasuni, *The Kurdish National Movements and Armenian-Kurdish Relations* (Beirut, 1969), p. 199.
[113] Eugene L. Rogan, "Aşiret Mektebi: Abdulhamid II's School for Tribes (1892-1907)", *IJMES* 28 (1996), p. 83.

Arabs and the Kurds. The latter had already received the treaty of Berlin with distaste due to its promise to undertake the necessary steps to protect the Armenians against the threat of the Kurds.[114] Accordingly, he first inaugurated a special tribal school, the *Mekteb-i Aşiret*, for the children of the chiefs of the Arab and Kurdish tribes, in order to foster allegiance to the Ottoman state. Following this, as France, Britain and Russia were pushing for reform; the Ottoman state organized certain Kurdish tribes into irregular cavalry regiments, namely the *Hamidiye alaylari* (Hamidiye regiments) in 1891. The creation of the Hamidiye regiments was a double-edged policy: to use them as a weapon "against Armenian brigands" and revolutionary groups, and to pacify and assimilate the Kurds.[115]

Estimates of the total number of Armenians killed between 1894-1896 range between 100,000 and 300,000.[116] When, in addition to those killed outright, one also considers the victims of the officially enforced Islamization, of the starvation and plagues caused by the pogroms that interrupted the life-sustaining agricultural activity, one reaches a far higher number.[117] Approximately 25,000 Armenians were forcibly converted to Islam in all of Diyarbekir province.[118] The villagers reported transgressions, brigandage and plunder by the Hamidiye regiments. Transgressions against Christians were apparently either not reported or not considered as transgressions.[119] Yet the memory of the atrocities was very much alive among the population of Diyarbekir before WWI as revealed in the travel account of Ely B. Soane:

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[114] Hamit Bozarslan, "Les relations Kurdo-Armeniennes: 1894-1996" in H. L. Kieser (ed.), *Die Armenishe Frage und Die Schweiz* (Zurich: Chronos Verlag, 1999), pp. 329-40.

[115] Suavi Aydın et al. *Mardin Aşiret Cemaat Devlet* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 2000), p. 317. Ali Karaca, *Anadolu Islahati ve Ahmet Şakir Pasa* (1838-1899) (Istanbul: Eren, 1993), pp. 76-77. Şevket Beysanoğlu, *Anıtları ve Kitabeleri ile Diyarbekir Tarihi, Akkoyunlulardan Cumhuriyete kadar* (Ankara: Diyarbekir Büyükşehir Belediyesi Yayınları, 1996), vol. 2, pp. 738-39. Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 47. Bayram Kodaman, *Sultan II. Abdülhamid Devri Doğu Anadolu Politikası* (Ankara: Turk Kulturunu Arastirma Enstitusu, 1987), p. 441; Osman Aytar, *Hamidiye Alaylarindan Koy Koruculuguna* (Istanbul: Medya Güneşi, 1992), pp. 41, 50, 77. L. Basmadjian, "Le mouvement révolutionnaire en Asie Mineure", *Revue du Monde Musulman* 4 (1908), pp. 819-25, quoted from Hamit Bozarslan,. "Les relations kurdo-arméniennes, 1894-1996", p. 337; Mark Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1915), pp. 313-24. Stephan Astourian, "Genocidal Process: Reflections on the Armeno-Turkish Polarization" in Richard Hovannisian (ed.) *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 61-62 and 66-67.

[116] T. Hoffman and G. Koutcharian, "The History of Armenian-Kurdish Relations in the Ottoman Empire", *Armenian Review* 39, no. 4 (1986), p. 18

[117] Ibid.

[118] The implications of the Hamidiye Brigades in the Jazira region can be found in the diaries of Abubekir Hazım Paşa (Tepeyran), the Mosul governor between the years 1899-1902. Abubekir Hazım (Tepeyran), *Hatıralar*, 2nd ed. (İstanbul: Pera, 1998), taken from Suavi Aydın et al., *Mardin Aşiret Cemaat Devlet*, p. 321.

[119] Selim Deringil, "The Ottoman Twilight Zone of the Middle East" in Henri Barkey (ed.) *Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey's Role in the Middle East* (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 1996), p. 18.

> It is among the underworld of western Kurdistan and northern Mesopotamia, a common subject of talk in the cafés how much the sultan and the Government paid the ruffians of the town to do their dirty work, and how much the Kurdish aghas presented to the authorities to be allowed to finish unhindered the blood-feuds that existed between themselves and Armenians sheltering in Diyarbekr and towns of Armenia. A very reign of terror overshadows the apparently peaceful and prosperous town.[120]

Still, not all the Kurdish tribes followed the collaborationist line and became the gendarme of the state in the region as did the Cibran, Hasenan, Zirkan, Miran, Karakeçili, Berezen, Milan, Heyderan, Ademan, Tokariyan, Zilan, Celali, Sipkan. Thus, not all the Kurdish notables enjoyed the sort of great prestige with Abdulhamid II as did Ibrahim Pasha Milli, who was given the task of guaranteeing the safety of the Hijaz railroad,[121] or Hacı Musa Bey of Mutki or Kör Hüseyin Pasha, who were viewed as uncontrollable but still legitimate authorities in the eyes of the state.[122] A certain number of Kurdish tribal and religious leaders opted to shield "their" Armenians, such as Mahmudzade Beytullah Bey, the *mir* of the Moks (Bahçesaray) to the south of Lake Van who protected the Armenians in his territory against the attacks of the Kurds between 1895 and1896. A section of the Heyderan tribe installed in the north of Lake Van also took under protection those Christians who were threatened by a rival section of the same tribe.[123] As early as 1887, there were certain Kurds who joined the Young Turks in exile and published articles in newspapers such as *Kurdistan* that opposed the anti-Armenian attacks of the Kurds and invited them to revolt against the Sultan.[124] In general, the writers of *Kurdistan* were on good terms with the Tashnak newspaper *Troshnak*. Among the writers of *Kurdistan*, Abdirehman Rehmi Bedirxani was hostile to the Hamidiye, in particular to Mustafa Milli Pasha, and reconsidered the *Hamidiye* issue in almost every number of its review.[125]

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[120] Ely B. Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise: With Historical Notices of the Kurdish Tribes and the Chaldeans of Kurdistan* (London: J. Murray, 1912), pp. 65-66.
[121] CHEAM, Louis Dillemann, *Les Français en Haute-Djezirah*, no. 50 (1937), p. 538.
[122] Hamit Bozarslan, "Remarques sur l'histoire des relations kurdo-arméniennes", *Journal of Kurdish Studies* 1 (1995), p. 8.
[123] Jelle Verheij, "'Les frères de terre et d'eau': sur le rôle des Kurdes dans les massacres arméniens de 1894-1896", *Les Annales de l'Autre Islam* 5 (1998), p. 255; Vahakn N. Dadrian *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Oxford/Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995), pp. 136-37; Osman Aytar, *Hamidiye Alaylarından Köy Koruculuğuna* (İstanbul: Medya Güneşi, 1992), p. 101.
[124] Verheij, p. 256.
[125] Hamit Bozarslan, "Remarques", p. 9, from M. E. Bozarslan (ed. and trans.), *Kurdistan* 1898 (Uppsala: Deng, 1991), p. 63.

Post-1908 Years

In the post-1908 period, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) continued Sultan Abdulhamid II's policy of recruiting the Kurdish aghas, *ulema*, and even ordinary Kurds into the ranks of the Hamidiye regiments, which were then renamed as *Aşiret Süvari Alayları* (Brigades of tribal cavalries). There were three developments in the years immediately before World War I that led to shaping the war time policies of the Young Turks.[126] Firstly, the huge losses of the Balkan Wars threatened the very existence of the empire and made the CUP leadership move increasingly towards Turkish nationalist policies. Secondly, the eastern Ottoman provinces, which had become contested territory for rival imperial powers and Kurdish and Armenian nationalist projects, alerted the CUP leaders to the need to maintain and penetrate these regions. Thirdly, the "Armenian reform plan" in 1913 was responded with fervour by the CUP and as a violation of Ottoman sovereignty. Besides, the CUP having seized power in a coup d'état on January 23, 1913, had a superior authority in order to exercise its Turkification policies in various domains of Ottoman society. As Uğur Ungör among several other researchers indicates that "the establishment of nation-states by formerly Ottoman subjects and the cleansing of the Ottoman Muslims in those regions confirmed suspicions in the CUP that non-Turkish Ottomans could not be trusted."[127] It organized the conduct of various detailed ethnographic research on almost every ethnic group in the country. The *İskân-ı Aşâir ve Muhacirîn Müdüriyeti* (Directorate for the settlement of tribes and immigrants, IAMM) was established in 1914 in order to advance the sedentarization of many Kurdish, Arab and Turcoman tribes, and to provide accommodation for the homeless Muslim refugees expelled from the Balkans and Russia.[128] Şükrü Kaya, who would become the Minister of Interior between 1924 and 1938, was appointed as the *Sevkiyat Müdürü* (Director of Relocation) of the IAMM, which would later be expanded to constitute four branches, namely Settlement, Intelligence, Relocation and Tribes.managing most of the deportations.[129] A special organization, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*, was established and brought under the direct control of the CUP. The outbreak of World War I gave the CUP the opportunity to obtain dictatorial powers and implement their Turkification policies, which gradually took on a more racist tone.

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[126] Uğur Ü. Üngör, *A Reign of Terror: CUP Rule in Diyarbekir Province, 1913-1923* (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2005), p. 17.
[127] Ibid.
[128] *İkdam*, 29 December 1913 (no.6052), p.3, taken from Uğur Ü. Üngör, *A Reign of Terror*, p. 17.
[129] Ibid.

The Ottoman Empire's entry into the war set in motion certain chains of events that would prove irreversible.The law of deportation was promulgated and its application was turned very quickly into a massive program of extermination of the Armenian population. In April 1915, some Armenians had sporadically been deported from their hometowns, though this was not yet an empire-wide campaign. As Uğur Üngör states, "the deportation of the Ottoman-Armenians was officially organized from May 23, 1915 onwards, when Talât issued orders for the deportation of all Armenians to Dayr al-Zor starting with the north-eastern provinces, authorizing the army to proceed with them and delegating its daily operations to the IAMM."[130] Armenian intellectuals, prominent businessman, political activists and others were liquidated first. Men of fighting age and ability were drafted into the army and placed in labor battalions, referred as *ta'bid* (enslavement) in local usage in the Syrian Jazira. Women, children and the elderly were either massacred, or survived but were raped, enslaved and adopted by Muslim households or converted to Islam by force. Armenian property was expropriated and transferred to Muslims loyal to the CUP.[131]

Bosnian Muslims, Bulgarian Turks and Albanian Muslims were sent to the Adana area and the Mardin plain including Diyarbekir to lodge in the empty Syriac and Armenian villages. There is very little information about the Muslim settlers in the region, but the survivor memoirs reveal that upon their return home after the termination of the war, they witnessed that their houses had been given to Muslim settlers.[132]

Religious motivations played an important role in the Kurdish participation in the Armenian massacres. The identities of the organizers and perpetrators in the massacres in Diyarbekir reveal that the local CUP elite collaborated with certain Kurdish tribesmen in order to achieve their aim of destroying the Armenians and the non-Armenian Christians of Diyarbekir and Mardin. The local CUP authorities successfully exploited the intra- and intertribal tensions between Kurdish tribes competing for economic and political power. The

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[130] Uğur Ü. Üngör, *A Reign of Terror*, p. 47.Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* (London/NY: Zed Books, 2004); Vahakn Dadrian, "The Role of the Special Organization in the Armenian Genocide during the First World War", in P. Panayi (ed.), *Minorities in Wartime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Raymond H. Kévorkian, *Le Génocide des Arméniens* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2006); Bloxham, *Great Game of Genocide*.

[131] Hilmar Kaiser, "Armenian Property, Ottoman Law and Nationalist Policies during the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1916", in Olaf Farschid, Manfred Kropp, Stephan Dähne (eds.), *The First World War as Remembered in the Countries of the Eastern Mediterranean* (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2006), pp. 49-71.

[132] Yves Ternon, *Mardin 1915*; Vahé Tachjian, *La France en Cilicie et en Haute Mésopotamie*; Uğur Ü. Üngör, *A Reign of Terror: CUP Rule in Diyarbekir Province, 1913-1923* (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2005); Fuat Dündar, "Balkan Savaşı Sonrasında Kurulmaya Çalışılan Muhacir Köyleri", *Toplumsal Tarih* 14, no. 82 (2000), pp. 52-55. Interviews by the author with several ex-refugees in Jazira, Aleppo, and Damascus prove this point.

Hazakh district and the Xerzan valley in the Beshiri district were explicitly disrupted by the tribal warfare. The feud between the Reşkotan and Etmankî tribes (which was settled by the victory of the former), and between Elikan and Pencînaran, were the two biggest sources of conflict in the region. [133] The latter conflict was caused by the Pencînar chieftain Bişarê Çeto, who annihilated the Armenian, Kurdish and Syriac villagers in the region together with his brother Cemilo Çeto.[134] The Reman tribe with its famous female chieftain Perîxan, the widow of İbrahim Paşa Milli, had six sons competing for power.[135] The Zirkî tribe in Lice had been fighting with the Mîlan tribe in order to gain control over parts of the northern region of Diyarbekir province while the chieftain of the former had aligned with the CUP when İbrahim pasha Milli refused to submit to their rule.[136]

Talât issued several decrees defining the categorical scope of those to be persecuted and deported. As Üngör states, on 22 June 1915, he excluded the Armenian converts to Islam from deportation to the south, yet in two weeks time he reincorporated the converts into the deportation.[137] On 4 August, Talât excluded the Armenian Catholics from deportation.[138] Besides these official directions, the genocide practice took the form of killing the men and deporting those women and children who were not assimilated into Muslim households.[139] A specific order excluding the Jacobite Syriacs from deportation was issued for those provinces of Diyarbekir, Bitlis, Aleppo and Urfa. [140] Although tens of thousands of Syriacs were massacred at the time, it saved a portion of the traumatized Syriac community, who continued to live in their home towns. Still, their relative comfort was contingent on the appointment of Süleyman Necmi, Reşid's successor as the governor of Diyarbekir. The Syriacs of Tour 'Abdin were comfortable at least for a limited period of time, before Süleyman Necmi was replaced by İbrahim Bedreddin (Bedri) who launched a second attack on the Syriacs of Tour 'Abdin.

The Mardin sanjak, unlike the Diyarbekir province, was able to escape the 1895-1896 persecutions thanks to protection provided by the Kurdish and Arab tribes of the region.[141] However, between June and September 1915, even the traditional allies of the Christians,

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[133] Uğur Ü. Üngör, *A Reign of Terror*, p. 29.
[134] For the clashes between the Kurdish tribes in the region, see Uğur Ü. Üngör, *A Reign of Terror*, pp. 27-31.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Uğur Ü. Üngör, *A Reign of Terror,* p. 29; Osman Sebrî, *Şerrên Sasûnê (1925-1937)*, http://www.tirej.name/osman% 20sebri/3.html.
[137] Uğur Ü. Üngör, *A Reign of Terror,* p. 72.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid. and Katharina Derderian, "Common Fate, Different Experience: Gender-Specific Aspects of the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005), pp. 1-25.
[140] Uğur Ü. Üngör, *A Reign of Terror,* p. 73.
[141] Hori Süleyman Hinno, *Farman: Tur Abdinli Süryanilerin Katliamı 1914-1915* (Athens: n.p., 1993).

such as the Hevêrkan confederation and the Yezidis, were split.[142] Tour ‘Abdin region heard of the attacks on other Christian villages mostly from Armenian survivors coming from the north to find a temporary shelter in the mountains. Armenians and Syriacs fleeing from the massacres in the Diyarbekir region managed to make their way to Midyat, the administrative centre of Tour ‘Abdin, after crossing the mountains. The Syriacs were alerted to the danger. The religious authorities reassured them that the attacks targeted *only* the Armenians and not the other denominations. Indeed, the anti-Syriac policy of the Ottomans was less articulated and concerted compared to that for the Armenians. However, the suggestion that the CUP only targeted the Armenians is contradicted by the broad diversity of non-Armenian victims, especially in Mardin district.[143] Non-Armenian Christians did not perish through outright massacre, nor did they join death marches; but they were not spared in the orders of provincial and local governors. Several of them were massacred at the hands of the gendarma, special militias or the local population, as expressed in a local Syriac saying: “white or red, an onion is still an onion.” Little is known regarding the scope of victims targeted in 1915. The most complete and detailed chronicle concerning the massacres in Mardin region comes from Ishaq Armalto, the secretary of Gabriel Tappouni, the Syriac Catholic archbishop in Mardin, who would soon move to Beirut and become one of the most fervent supporters of a French mandate in Syria and Lebanon.[144] As well as this, the accounts of the French Dominican missionaries of Mosul, who arrived in Mardin in December 1914 and stayed until November 1916, provide detailed accounts of perpetrators and the circumstances before and during the events.[145] By May 1915, though most of the Christian notables of Diyarbekir were persecuted, there had not been much persecution in Mardin. Reşid Bey had ordered the mayor, Hilmi Bey, to arrest the Armenian, Chaldean and Syriac Catholic notables of the city, but the mayor answered that the Armenians of Mardin were Arabic-speaking Catholics and had little in common with the Orthodox Armenians. The mayor added that they were unarmed and honourable citizens, and that there was no reason to arrest any other Christians either.[146] Reşid

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[142] David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim–Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I* (Piscataway: Gorgios Press, 2006), p. 187.
[143] For the Mardin district, see Yves Ternon, *Mardin 191*; Gaunt, *Massacres.*
[144] Ishaq Armalto, *al-qusara fi nakabat al-nasara* [The calamities of the christians] (Beirut: al-Sharfe monastery, Lebanon 1919; repr. Beirut, 1977.)
[145] Jacques Rhétoré, *Les Chrétiens aux Bêtes* (Paris: CERF, 2005); Hyacinthe Simon, *Mardin La ville héroïque: Autel et tombeau de l’Arménie (Asie Mineure) durant les massacres de 1915* (Jounieh, Lebanon: Maison Naaman pour la Culture, 1991); Marie-Dominique Berré, “Massacres de Mardin”, *Haigazian Armenological Review* 17 (1997), pp. 81-106.
[146] Audo Israel, “Faji’at Mardin Athna’ al-Ittihad allathi Jara ‘ala Masihiyyin, Khususan al-Arman, 1915” [The disaster of Mardin during the persecution that happened to the Christians, especially the Armenians, 1915] in Ara Sarafian (ed.), *Haigazian, Majallat al-Dirasat al-Armaniyya* 18 (1998), p. 264.

was not impressed by this reply: he removed Hilmi Bey from office and replaced him with Şefik Bey. But Şefik was also reluctant to follow these orders, so he was sent to Mosul. His replacement, Bedri Bey, was sent to Mardin with a special commission to organize the persecution of Christians. This commission was composed of [Gevranlizade] Memduh [Koranli] Bey (Police Commissioner); Mektubcu [Provincial Secretary] Bedreddin Bey, who became the new mutesarrif of Mardin in August 1915; and Dr. Reşid's aide-de-camp, Sergeant [Çerkez] Şakir Bey, who became the head of gendarmerie at Mardin. Reşid's genocidal policies were supported by a local Muslim sub-committee headed by the mayor of Mardin.[147]

Most of the massacres in Tour 'Abdin were committed in June 1915 at the hands of certain Kurdish tribesmen and the newly-formed paramilitary groups.[148] The units were made up of fifty Muslim volunteers, drawn from the local population and supplied with uniforms and rifles. One group of so-called *al-khamsin* units, under the command of Qaddour Bey, the *kaimakam* of Nusaybin who would later become the new mayor of Qamishli, was active around Nusaybin; another under the control of Nuri al-Ansari around Mardin; and another around Diyarbekir under Sidki Feyzi Bey's relative.[149] The *al-khamsin* militia sometimes carried out the massacres single-handedly, but they required the help of Kurdish tribesmen for attacks on the large villages in the district of Mardin which harboured thousands of Christians, such as Qu'sor (Gulliye) and Tell Arman (today's Kızıltepe in Turkey). Mustafa, one of the six sons of the Reman tribe, together with the militia under the command of Memduh Bey, participated in the attacks on many Syriac villages: 'Ayn Wardo, Dayro da Slibo, Dufne, Habsnus, Hasankeyf and Kabiye.[150] On 1 July 1915, Memduh's militia and a large number of Kurdish tribesmen, with assistance from the village headman Derviş Bey, attacked Tell Arman and massacred the population, both men and women.[151] On 2 July, the same Memduh ordered an attack on Qu'sor (Gulliye), a Jacobite Syriac agricultural centre. The militia was headed by Sergeant Yusuf, the son of Nuri al-Ansari and aided by Mohammed agha of the Milli tribe. The Kurdish tribesmen of the Dekşuri, Mishkiye and Helecan tribes also participated in the massacres.[152] By the third day of looting, the once-

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[147] Ara Sarafian, "Ficaia Mardin", p. 59.
[148] Gaunt, *Massacres*, p. 188; "ACSU, Assyrian-Chaldean-Syriac Union", *Bethsuryoyo*, 2000, http://www .bethsuryoyo.com/currentevents/demonstration/ACSU.html.
[149] Armalto, *al-qusara*; David Gaunt, "Death's End: The General Massacres of Christians in Diyarbekir", in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Armenian Tigranakert/Diarbekir and Edessa/Urfa* (CA: Mazda, 2006), p. 323.
[150] Gaunt, "Death's End", p. 325.
[151] Armalto, *al-qusara*, pp. 102-3;Ternon, *Mardin 1915*, pp. 119-20; Hori Süleyman Hinno, *Ferman*, pp. 149-51.
[152] Armalto, *al-qusara*, p. 102; Simon, *Mardine: la ville héroïque*, p. 53.

prosperous Qu'sor had been reduced to complete devastation.[153] Thanks to intertribal rivalries and political factionalism between the competing Kurdish tribes in the Tour 'Abdin region,namely the rivalries between the Hevêrkan-Dekşuri, Elikê Battê (Ali Battake) -Çelebi agha Saruxan, Mehmedo-Nehroz, some protection was provided to local Christian groups. Several Syriacs of Nusaybin took refugee in the Kurdish villages belonging to the former families/tribes in order to escape from the World War I military mobilization.[154]

Some minor resistance was offered in only a few places, in late 1915. The local authorities were clever enough to exploit the feud between the rival Christian faiths. 'Ayn Wardo and Azix (alternatively, Hazakh) were the most famous sites of resistance, where Syriacs from different denominations took up arms and defended themselves against the Turkish gendarmes. The memories of resistance in these two places will be discussed in more detail in the coming pages. Elsewhere, denominational conflict and personal rivalries undermined solidarity and resistance efforts, especially in Midyat.[155]

The victims of the genocide are horrified and bewildered by the dehumanization and gratuitous cruelty that they witnessed or heard of firsthand from the survivors. Jaziran Armenians state that those who were not massacred were the ones who were functional for the well-being of the agha and his tribe, such as small-artisan households specialized in the production of agricultural equipment, or peasants who could work slave-like on his lands. This claim accords well with occupational profile of the survivors who found refugee in Jazira, most of them being either peasants or small artisans.[156] Despite the indications of a self-interest motive in the rescue attempts by the Kurdish aghas, Jaziran Armenians do not refrain from expressing praise for the generous and just Kurdish aghas or religious sheikhs. Most of them recall that they were compelled to move to another proximate village or town after the war, and married the Christians of the new village thanks the protection of the merciful agha. (Resul Xelid was the *mukhtar* of the village of Tell Cihan.) The names of these aghas—Çelebi, Elikê Battê and Saruxan Hajo—are still remembered, even among the third generation.[157] Relations between the survivors and the agha family members who remained in

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[153] Rhétoré, *Les Chretiens*, pp. 195-96.
[154] Hori Süleyman Hinno, pp. 27-30; Xori Slayman □ënno Arka□oyo,"Bet-Zabday/Hazax (İdil) ve Civar Köylerinde 1915'te Yapılan Soykırım", *ZENDA*, 26 Jan 1986, pp. 17-20.
[155] Gaunt, *Massacres*, pp.181-96.
[156] CADN, Syrie-Liban, 1er versement, no. 1065, lettre (no. 4204/DZ)) du colonel Callasi, Délègue Adjoint du Haut Commissaire pour le Sandjak de Deir ez Zor au Délègue du Haut-Commissaire à Damas, 24 Octobre 1928, Deir ez Zor, p.1.
[157] For Alikê Battê, see FO 371/4191 9 April 1919; http://www.ozgurpolitika.org/2002/09/15/hab38.html; Hamdi Ertuna, *Türk İstiklal Harbi V. Cilt İstiklal Harbinde Ayaklanmalar (1919-1921)* (Ankara: TC Genelkurmay Harp Tarihi Başkanlığı, Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1974), pp. 41-43; Hori Süleyman Hinno, *Farman*, p. 61. Ali Enver

Turkey are said to have continued up until 1950s, while the eastern stretch of the border was still not strictly closed. Even marital relations existed between the Kurdish agha and his former Christian peasants. Hajo of Hevêrkan is legendary among the Jaziran Christians for the generous protection he provided; other figures celebrated for their conscientiousness over the (Jaziran) Armenians from Bisheri (Bişêrî) are (Haji) Husni Mihemed Mista(fe) and Mirzo agha.[158] Bişare Çeto, the chief of the Pencinar tribe, and his brother Cemile Çeto who was executed following the Sheikh Said revolt, as well as Mahzo Çavuş and Islam Bey, are remembered as evil people who participated in the annihilation of Armenian, Kurdish and Syriac villagers in the region.[159]

There are no exact population figures regarding the Armenians that continued to live in the east of Diyarbekir after the Genocide, but French intelligence reports give an idea about the number of remaining Armenian villagers in the Diyarbekir province in 1924: Silvan: 3,300; Hazro: 120; Lidjé (Lice): 150; Beshiri (Bişêrî): 300; Rechkotan(Gharzan): 4,000; Severek (Sêwreg): 100; Aguel (Gêl): 70.[160] Another French source states that there were around 3,500 Armenians in the Gharzan and Bişêrî region in October 1928.[161] These Armenians continued to live under extreme deprivation and impoverishment until the Sheikh Said revolt in mid 1925.[162] They were able to avoid the expulsion campaign of the nascent Turkish Republic in the early1920s thanks to the remoteness of their settlements, and Kurdish protection. However, they could not escape from another violent attack by the Turkish state in 1925, during the Sheikh Said revolt, which was directed against the Kurdish population of the region.[163] British sources state that there were around 20-30 thousand Armenians living in Diyarbekir, Bitlis, Malatya and Harpout region— the region from which the last group of

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Toksoy, *Milli Mücadelede Mardin* (Resimli Ay Matbaası: İstanbul, 1939); Genl. Kenan Esengin, *Milli Mücadelede Hıyanet Yarışı* (Ulusal Basımevi: Ankara, 1969), p. 40-45; Louis Dillemann, "Les Français en Haute Djézireh 1929-1939" *Revue Françaises d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer* 66 (1979), p.43.

[158] Osman Sebrî, *Şerrên Sasûnê (1925-1937)*, http://www.tirej.name/osman%20sebri/3.html. Mirzo Agha together with Kör Hüseyin Pasha was exiled to Damascus by the Republican government after the Ararat revolt. See www.welatperez.com.

[159] For the clashes between Kurdish tribes in the region, see Uğur Ü. Üngor, *Reign*, pp. 27-31; http://www.tirej .name/osman%20sebri/3.html.

[160]CADN, Syrie-Liban, Turquie, Box 1782, compte-rendu de renseignement, no.27, 31 May 1924, "Vexations contre les éléments non-turcs: la déportation des Chrétiens de Diarbekir" (source: SR Alep).

[161] Taken from Tachjian, *La France en Cilicie et en Haute Mésopotamie*, p. 175. SHAT, 4H 85/d: 3, Service des Renseignements, région de l'Euphrate, Bulletin de Renseignements, no. 79, 10 October 1928, source: Informateur de la région de Karamanié.

[162] Martin van Bruinessen, "Popular Islam, Kurdish nationalism and rural revolt: The rebellion of Sheikh Said in Turkey (1925)", in János M. Bak and Gerhard Benecke (eds.), *Religion and Rural Revolt* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 281-95.

[163] For the Sheikh Said revolt, see Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion: 1880-1925* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), pp. 91-163 and van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, pp.300-2.

survivors were expulsed—that were susceptible to be deported to Syria.[164] Throughout 1929, 4,700 Armenians were registered as entering Syria.[165] According to the League of Nations figures, around 8,000 to 10,000 immigrants entered Syria up until the end of 1929.[166] Those who arrived in the winter of 1929 are said to have bribed their way through Syria, sometimes with their animals and with small flocks of sheep and furniture, in early1920s; the Armenians are said to have joined up with the Kurdish farmers; some of the latecomers in the winter of 1929-30, however, arriving in Syria on foot, are said to have been robbed on their way and reduced to misery.[167]

The Sheikh Said revolt was crushed by the Turkish state by all military and non military means in the early summer of 1925. There are no accurate figures but according to one source, 206 Kurdish villages were wiped off the map, 8758 houses burnt and 15,200 people killed. [168]Sheikh Said and his fifty-two men were executed in Diyarbekir,on 29 June 1925.

Martial law was declared, and new administrative measures and deportation schemes were introduced in order to deport 50,000 Kurds by the methods used for the Armenians and Greeks.[169] Thanks to the Friendship and Neighbourly Relations Agreement between France and Turkey (1926), the Turkish state was entitled to use the Baghdad railway for military transportation to the Diyarbekir region. Air bombardments accompanied the land operations. During the revolt, Martial Law was declared and the law stayed active until 23 November 1927.[170] In 23 May 1928, a general amnesty was proclaimed, and on 26 June 1927, following a new administrative measure, a general inspectorate was introduced in the region to replace martial law.[171]

Following the suppression of the revolt, the Turkish state continued its assimilationist policies against the Kurds in the form of exiles and a new settlement law (1934). The

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[164] PRO, FO 371/14567, Pol. Eastern-Turkey, Expulsion of Armenians from Turkey to Syria, E3794/203/304, From Gracey to Mr. Rendel, confidential copy of the report by Mr Gracey /Save the Children Fund on visit to Syria in March April to investigate conditions of settlement of Armenians in Syria, 09. July 1930; Vahé Tachjian, "The expulsion of non-Turkish ethnic and religious groups from Turkey to Syria during the 1920s and early 1930s", *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence*, 5 March 2009, p. 3. http://www.massviolence.org/The-expulsion-of-non-Turkish-ethnic-and-religious-groups?artpage=6.
[165] Tachjian, *La France en Cilicie et en Haute Mésopotamie*, p. 283.
[166] CADN, Syria-Liban, Bureau Diplomatique, no. 2544, letter no. 375, 22 December 1929, Beirut.
[167] PRO, FO 371/14567, Pol. Eastern-Turkey, Expulsion of Armenians from Turkey to Syria, E3794/203/304, From Gracey to Mr. Rendel, confidential copy of the report by Mr Gracey/Save the Children Fund on visit to Syria in March April to investigate conditions of settlement of Armenians in Syria, 9 July 1930, p. 6.
[168] Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, *Kurdistan and the Kurds* (Prague: Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, 1965), p.52.
[169] Yves Ternon, *La Cause Arménienne* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983), p. 102.
[170] Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Tek Parti Yönetim''nin Kurulması 1923-1931* (Istanbul: Cem Publishing House, 1993), p.147.
[171] Tunçay, *Tek Parti*, p. 178.

extermination of the remaining Christians in the eastern provinces of Turkey and new regulations concerning their properties left in their homelands were also underway. The French and British archives are full of reports of eye witnesses describing the exodus of Armenians and the treatment of Christians in their home towns in Turkey in the second half of the 1920s. These reports are usually written after the conversations between the British Foreign Office, the French authorities in Syria and philanthropic organizations such as the "Save the Children Fund" or the "Armenian Central Committee."

The year 1929 was marked by another wave of Armenian migration, especially from Kharput and the southern districts of Diyarbekir. Passports with the stamp of interdiction of return were distributed to the Armenians of Kharput.

Uprooted for the second time in a decade, the "left-over" Armenian peasants did not have much option but to find refuge in the French Jazira.[172] The main reason underlying their flight to Jazira—but not to Aleppo or other Syrian towns on the western stretch of the border—was mainly their strong desire to be as close as possible to their homes, and they cherished the hope of return once the political situation was normalized. Unlike their compatriots who had reached Aleppo from the vilayet of Mamuret ul-Aziz (today: Elazığ) and the western sector of Diyarbekir province in the early 1920s, and who were lucky enough to be spared excessive Turkish violence before and during their journey to the Syrian frontier, the path of the Armenian refugees to French Jazira was a painful and risky one.[173]

Travelling in small groups (not in convoys), usually with their Kurdish compatriots, or paying a Kurdish brigand for safe conduct, the flight of Armenians from the eastern regions of Diyarbekir to the French-founded towns on the Turco-Syrian border continued until the mid 1930s. A typical description of my interviewees' forced journey, in the words of an elderly survivor woman from Bişêrî, was as follows:

> We travelled to Jazira under the guidance of Kurdish smugglers. They filled one of the two saddlebags of their horses with stone and put me in the other one. Yet we were attacked and robbed by some others on our way. We heard of people being arriving at Syriac village of Zaz

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[172] For an elaborate account of captive Armenians in Syria and Lebanon, see Vahram Shemmassian, "Reclamation of Captive Armenian Genocide Survivors", *Society for Armenian Studies* 15 (2006), pp. 113-140. For the situation of Armenian deportees in Syria, see Hilmar Kaiser, *At the crossroads of Der Zor: Death, Survival, Human Resistance and Humanitarian resistance in Aleppo, 1915-1917* (Princeton, NJ: Gomidas Institute, 2001); Raymond Kevorkian, "L'Extermination des déportés arméniennes ottomans dans les camps de concentration de Syrie-Mésopotamie (1915-1916)", *Revue d'histoire Arménienne contemporaine II* (1988); Ara Sanjian, "The Armenian Minority Experience in the Arab World", *Inter-Faith Studies* 3, no.1 (Spring–Summer, 2001), pp. 149-179; Vahé Tachjian, "Expulsion of the Armenian Survivors of Urfa and Diarbekir, 1923- 1930" in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Armenian Tigranakert/Diarbekir and Edessa/Urfa* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2006), pp. 519-38.

[173] Tachjian, "Expulsion", p. 531.

> and provided food. We arrived to Tell Abyad and worked as sharecroppers on the lands of Muslat pasha of the Arab Jabar tribe.

The flight of middle-class Armenians, mostly Catholics from Mardin, was relatively less arduous. Some of them fled to Mosul as soon as the massacres began. The French occupation of Jazira initiated this group's arrival in Syria. Their choice of location for settlement followed the French route of occupation in Jazira. The last Armenian exodus to the French Jazira occurred in the early 1940s due to political and economic reasons. In May 1941 the Turkish state applied another anti-Christian measure as a part of its Turkification policies: this involved the military conscription of non-Muslims to serve in the labour battalions in 1941 and 1942.[174] This year coincided with a general famine in the whole region. Escaping from political and economic hardship, they were welcomed by the French authorities in French-Syria who were in need of grain to feed the French armies in several fronts in the Second World War.[175]

In 1926, following the violent crushing of Sheikh Said rebellion (1925) and during the heyday of the Mosul conflict (1926), the Tour 'Abdin region and its immediate surroundings could not escape from the Turkish state's oppressive centralization efforts in line with the post-Sheikh Said security measures in the eastern provinces of Turkey. Both the Sheikh Said Revolt and the Mosul issue formed the pretext for the Turkish state to carry out its Turkification policies in the Tour 'Abdin region, where most of the Syriac population had been living.[176] Extreme coercion and military control in the region meant absence of safety, and great social and economic insecurity. Poor harvests, severe economic conditions, anti-Christian intimidation, and later the compulsory military service, further complicated the local population's everyday struggle for survival. Both Kurds and Syriacs continued to arrive in Jazira in small groups up until 1950s. While some of them immediately settled in one of the newly flourishing towns of the French Jazira (such as the Armenians whose access to the

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[174] Known as "20 Kura Ihtiyatlar Olayı", this refers to the forced conscription of all non-Muslim men aged between twenty and forty to work in labour battalions. Thousands of non-Muslim men were released in July 1942, four months before the Wealth Tax, the levy on non-Muslims of a disproportionate and discriminatory tax in 1942. Rıfat Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri - Bir Türkleştirme serüveni (1923-1945)* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2001), pp. 411-23; Dilek Güven, *6-7 Eylül 1955 Olayları* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2006), pp. 133-35.

[175] Jean Hannoyer, "Le Monde Rural avant les Réformes", in André Raymond, *La Syrie Aujourd'hui* (Paris: CNRS, 1980), pp. 273-97; Françoise Metral, "Le Monde Rural Syrien A l'Ère Des Reformes (1958-1978)", in André Raymond, *La Syrie Aujourd'hui* (Paris: CNRS, 1980), pp. 297-327; Günter Meyer, "Rural Development and Migration in Northeast Syria" in M. Murdock and P. Salem (eds.), *Anthropology and Development in North Africa and the Middle East* (NY: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 245-77; Myriam Ababsa, "Frontières de développement en Syrie: l'adaptation du projet Ba'thiste aux logiques tribales dans le front pionnier de la Jazîra", *A Contrario* 2, no. 3 (2005), pp. 11-25.

[176] Vahé Tachjian, "Les événements ultérieurs à 1925: Les vexations contre les Syriaques du Tour 'Abdin", *Imprescriptible, Base documentaire sur le génocide arménien*, http://www.imprescriptible.fr/rhac/tome3/p2c#e.

Turkish territory was completely debarred), some worked as seasonal workers and continued to travel between the two sides of the border. Varying according to class, occupation and relations with the border officials, the Kurds and to a lesser extent the Syriacs were more mobile thanks to their relatives and social and trade networks across the border in Turkey.

Seferberlik in Syrian Historiography

This section will present the main outlines of how the *seferberlik* – the Ottoman military mobilization during World War I, has been cast in mainstream Syrian historiography. It aims to draw attention to the convergences and divergences between the Jaziran sectarian/nationalist narratives about the *ferman* and afterwards, and the Syrian nationalist historiography about World War I. In this way I will be able to trace the ways in which the Syrian nationalist imperatives informed the Jaziran's collective memory of the *ferman* and their implications for the re-constitution of ethno-religious communal subjectivities.

There are few scholarly works about the social history of World War I in Syria and Lebanon through which the effects of the war on the political consciousness of local inhabitants in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine and their sense of belonging to the Ottoman Empire can be discerned. This lack is mainly due to the establishment of the mandate regimes immediately after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, thus the priority of the issue of independence over other concerns in the Syrian historiography.

World War I brought social disruption of immense magnitude in Syria proper, and also in south-eastern Anatolia, where the majority of today's Jazirans originate. Syria endured military conscription and a confluence of factors including forced exile, a serious requisitioning of food and labour animals, an extended allied blockade, a succession of unusually harsh winters, periodic locust attacks, and severe epidemics that collectively resulted in widespread suffering and death. [177] The famine which spread out over a four-year period and led to more than five hundred thousand deaths in greater Syria is indeed the strongest memory of World War I.[178] While famine was one of the reasons for loss of life, conscription (*seferberlik*) to the Ottoman army was another. By 1916, the Ottoman Empire was conscripting men aged between 17 and 55, both Muslim and Christian (except those in Mount Lebanon), into an army that numbered nearly 2.5 million troops (out of a pre-war

[177] Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, "The Famine of 1915-1918 in Greater Syria", in John Spagnolo (ed.), *Problems of the Modern Middle East in Historical Perspective* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1992), pp. 234-54
[178] Ibid.

population of 18.1 million).[179] Casualties neared 1 million, with one-fourth dying of disease. As military subscription and suffering came to be linked in people's minds, *seferberlik* in Lebanese and Syrian popular memory has become synonymous with the World War I famine. Although the accounts diverge in their attitudes to the Ottoman rule and in their assessments of the decision by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) to participate in the war, there appears to be a general consensus among Syrian writers that Ottoman wartime policies in Syria, military conscription, and the "policy of starvation,"[180] were destructive and depraved. It evoked memories of hunger, fear, violence and loss in the Syrian popular memory.

Schilcher, in her article about the causes and development of the famine, argues that the famine is an event which is written into the collective memory and influenced the political culture of later years.[181] The blame for the famine is usually put on the Ottomans, while the role of the naval blockade of the British and French forces is nearly forgotten. The famine is still referred to as the "Turkish famine" and it is considered as the most tangible sign of the 400 years of "Ottoman colonization" in Syria.

Seferberlik, literally an official call for military service, refers to a set of interrelated historical events during World War I that are remembered with emotional significance for millions of people who lived through them and their children and grandchildren. Despite the fact there is a crowding of meaning in the memories of *seferberlik* in the Syrian collective memory in general, *seferberlik* refers to World War I, or to the wars from which nobody ever returns, and to those sites from where no one comes home.[182] It dissolves into a series of overlapping associations, referring to a variety of experiences by the local population such as hunger, flight, dislocation and death, and in particular going away and never coming back. In general, the term *seferberlik* triggers associations with highly charged set of images,

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[179] Ibid.

[180] 'Anbara Salam al-Khalidi, *Jawla fi al- Dhikrayat*, p. 107, taken from Christoph Schumann, "Individual and Collective Memories of the First World War", in Olaf Farschid, Manfred Krop and Stephan Dähne (eds.), *The First World War as Remembered in the Countries of the Eastern Mediterranean* (Beirut: Orient Institute/Ergon Verlag, 2006), pp. 247-64.

[181] Schilcher, p. 232.

[182] Khalid al-'Azm, *Mudhakkirat*, [Memories], 3 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 1973), p. 75. For the *safarbarlik* in Syria, see Hanna Minna, *The Fragments of Memory. A story of a Syrian Family*, trans. Olive Kenny and Lorne Kenny (Austin: University of Texas, 1993); Nadya al-Ghazzi, *Shirwal Barhum, Ayyam min Safarbarlik* (Damascus, 1983); Kamil al-Ghazzi, *Kitab Nahr al-Dhahab fi Tarikh Halab*, 3 vols. ed. Shawqi Sha'th and Mahmoud Fakhouri (Aleppo: Arab Pen Press, 1991); 'Abd al-Fattah Rawwas Qal'aji, *Urs halabi wa hikayat min safarbarlik* [An Aleppan wedding and stories from safarbarlik] (Damascus, 1984); Schatkowski Schilcher, "The Famine of 1915-1918 in Greater Syria", in John P. Spagnolo (ed.), *Problems of the Modern Middle East in Historical Perspective: Essays in Honour of Albert Hourani* (Beirut: Ithaca Press, 1992), pp. 229-58.

memories and meanings intimately related to issues of personal, religious and national identity. [183]

Associations of *seferberlik* do not contain the tension of opposites in Syria, as is the case in Palestine-Israel, Turkey and India-Pakistan. In all these three cases, war and *seferberlik* correspond to collective memories of overwhelming trauma, but they also correspond to core narratives of national liberation and triumph as the war is followed by a historical "achievement," a sovereign nation-state which overshadowed and indeed redeemed the war's trauma.[184] In that sense, for the Turkish nationalists, it meant a homeland secured, but at the same time it meant a home lost forever for the undesirables of the new regime. However, for the cases of Syrian and Lebanon, as Christoph Schumann shows, World War I can only be told as a "drama" or as a "tragedy." [185] In the words of Najwa al-Qattan, the Great War was first and foremost a very local civilian catastrophe, a war at home.[186] Famine is one of the constituents of this drama whose memories invoke transgression.[187] This becomes especially apparent in the memories of hunger, such as mothers eating their children like cats and mothers grabbing food out of their babies' mouths. The narratives of chaos are always gendered and sometimes sectarian: the girls selling their bodies for a loaf of bread or parents giving their daughters away like commodities. Class is another distinguishing factor in the memories. Those who died were the poorest in society whereas the rich were able to escape the war by paying compensation (*bedel*), or earn fortunes by grain speculation. However, Schilcher points out a paradoxical process: the deepening of class consciousness and the reaffirmation of patron-client ties are a legacy of famine because patrons had been a more reliable source of security and nourishment than the state itself.[188] She argues that the s*eferberlik* undermined trust between different communities as the memories of wartime trauma were different among Christians and Muslims (the letters sent to the French during the wartime expressed Christian's view that Muslims and Turks were the cause of their suffering). The arrival of Armenian refugees in Syria, whose numbers exceeded 100,000, and

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[183] Najwa al-Qattan, "Safarbarlik, Ottoman Syria and the Great War" in Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schuman (eds.), *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon* (Beirut: Orient Institute/Ergon Verlag, 2004).
[184] There is a vast literature concerning the Palestinian issue. To cite a few sources, particularly on the *nakba* (disaster) following the foundation of the state of Israel (1948), see Ahmad H. Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod (eds.), *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2007); Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens (eds.), *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question* (London: Verso, 2001).
[185] Schumann, "Individual and Collective Memories of the First World War", p. 252.
[186] Najwa al-Qattan, "Safarbarlik", p. 166.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Schilcher, p. 233.

the rapid increase in the population of cities (especially Aleppo from 127,000 in 1914 to 320,000 in 1943), was another factor that added to the sectarian hostility.[189]

The hegemonic Syrian official narrative, however, has privileged the "common national suffering" aspect, while it silences the diminishment of inter-communal trust in society. The famine which led thousands of people die has been used as a topos in the Syrian nationalist writing as a sign of Ottoman misrule. The "communal suffering" of Muslims and Christians alike at the hands of the Turks, the common enemy, describes official narratives of famine. As wartime suffering became synonymous with "400 years of Ottoman misrule," it was translated into a *collective*, primarily a *national*, suffering. Common experience of suffering played a pivotal role in the construction of the Syrian-Arab nation. Renan states that "having collectively suffered" (*avoir souffert ensemble*) is one of the makers of a nation, or in in Renan's words, as applied to the Syrian case by Jonathan Greenberg:

> More valuable [for a nation] by far … is the fact of sharing, in the past, a glorious heritage and regrets, and of having, in the future, a shared programme to put into effect, or the fact of having suffered, enjoyed, and hoped together. In other words, the collective memories of *seferberlik* gave expression to a collectivity defined by its endurance in the face of violence and victimization. The famine from which only a certain part of the population suffered is transformed into a national myth. That is to say, *seferberlik* in the Syrian collective memory acknowledges the burden of collective deprivation. However, a discourse of collective resistance and endurance accompany to and sometimes subvert the discourse of victimization. Suppressing the memories of the "non-illicit," namely the war time profiteering, desertion, "anti-nationalist" political activities with the enemy and so on, while heightening the memories of "collective deprivation" address the exigencies of national development and is essential "to further domestic political requirements and mobilize communities towards the integrative revolution necessary to build a national state.[190]

French Mandate Rule in Syria

After the loss of Mosul and Cilicia, making Syria into a profitable colony became something of a test case for the pro-mandate circles in the *Parti Colonial*, which were pitted against the anti-Syrian majority in France.[191] The Orontes valley, the Euphrates valley and the Jazira plain in Syria were viewed as the most viable places for the intended maximization of economic returns. Several reports, whether drafted by missionaries, military officers, or

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[189] Schilcher, p. 236.
[190] Jonathan Greenberg, "Generations of Memory: Remembering Partition in India/Pakistan and Israel/Palestine", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 1 (2005), p. 94.
[191] C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, "The French Colonial Party: Its Composition, Aims and Influence, 1885-1914," *The Historical Journal* 14, no. 1 (1971), pp. 99-128.

Servive de Renseignement officers, present the French willingness to occupy and exploit High Jazira as a consequence of economic, social and politically-inspired imperial concerns. A letter from Robert de Caix, one of the most fervent supporters of French mandatory rule in Syria, outlines the intentions of the colonial power, explaining that the Upper Jazira has to be effectively *colonné* by a Christian population "traditionally *loyal*" to the French. The letter describes High Jazira as a region where there is no one, but only a dust (*poussière*) of nomads and which has to be "*remettre en valeur*."[192]

French native policy in Morocco, as formulated by Lyautey, formed the main inspiration for the French colonial rule in Syria, namely *association* rather than *assimilation* of the native population.[193] The French experience in Morocco suggested three specific strategies: the exploitation of ethno-religious differences through the establishment of autonomously administered zones in Syria; setting the rural areas against the nationalist centre; and exploiting the inter-elite rivalries and using "docile elements" to help govern. Nevertheless, the Lyautey way did not bring much "success," and Syria continued to be an unattractive colony for the French officials. This has to do with external constraints (a world economic depression, tight economic policies in Syria, political instability in France), but also with the insouciance of the French officials, who tended to assume that they had grasped the Syrian situation when in fact they usually underestimated it. It was as late as the 1930s that the French began producing detailed studies of the political and socioeconomic realities of Syria, which only slightly improved French policy in the country.[194] French underestimation and misapprehension of Syrian society were manifested most clearly in their perception of Arab nationalism and related ethno-religious politics. Presenting itself and legitimizing its colonial presence as the "protectors of the Christians of the Orient," one of the initial tasks undertaken by the French authorities in Syria and Lebanon was the division of the territory into autonomously administered Sanjaks. In September 1920, France created five separate states and granted them financial and administrative autonomy: the Sanjak of Alawites, the Sanjak of Jabal Druze, the Autonomous Sanjak of Alexandretta and the state of Lebanon. The inner

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[192] MAE, Levant, 1918-1940, Irak, vol. 51, Lettre de Robert de Caix, Haut Commissaire p.i. en Syrie-Liban, à Alexandre Millerand, Président du Conseil et Ministre des AE, 8 Avril 1920, Beyrouth, pp. 185-87.

[193] For a comparative study of French policy in Morocco and Syria, see Edmund Burke III, "A Comparative View of French Native Policy in Morocco and Syria, 1912-1925," *Middle Eastern Studies* 9, no. 2 (1973), pp. 175-86; and Raymond Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial theory, 1890-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), pp. 106-33.

[194] Pierre Rondot, "L'expérience du mandat Français en Syrie et au Liban (1918-1945)," *Revue Générale du Droit International Publique* 3-4, (1948), p. 390. Following the victory of the leftist Popular Front in 1936, a specialized institute, CHEAM, was established in Paris in order to provide additional training to the colonial administrators in North Africa and Levant.

Syrian towns—Aleppo, Damascus, Homs and Hama—were merged into one state. The Jaziran stretch of the Turkish-Syrian border was still contested between Turkey and Syria. the French Jazira's status as an autonomous Sanjak begins after 1930.

The main objective of the French policy of dividing Syria into small territories along religious and ethnic lines was to isolate and contain the nationalist movement in the central towns, and prevent Arab nationalism from infecting the coastal and rural areas.[195] Through this ethnocentric administrative policy, which cut off and granted a certain degree of autonomy to the "minority-inhabited" territories, the French managed to present itself as the benevolent master and legitimize its rule among these groups.

The colonial view of Muslim societies underlay the politics of dividing Syria into five statelets. Not long before the establishment of the mandate rule in Syria in July 1920, Robert de Caix wrote in *L'Asie Française*, the official journal of the French colonial party, that Syria was far from being a real cultural and political unity or a self-governing entity, and thus that the notion of a united Syria was an irrelevant construction. Arab societies were assumed to be formed of religious communities but not of nations and classes.[196] In particular, "Syria was a crazy quilt of religious and ethnic communities, a mosaic of races and religions."[197] Thus, it was necessary to group them according to their atavistic origins and level of civilization, and then "appliquer une thérapeutique différente à chacune des structures sociales et religieuses des états."[198]

Accompanying this ideological analysis was an unsophisticated perception of Arab nationalism, which eventually dominated the Syrian politics of Quai d'Orsay and other non-state colonial actors.[199] According to this view, Arab nationalism at its core was Muslim fanaticism bent on obstructing the spread of Western civilization and progress in the East, the animating force of which was French.[200] The British were encouraging the Arab nationalist movement in order to weaken the French presence in Levant. The most alarmist French view of Arab nationalism pictured it as an infectious disease spreading to North Africa, and so menacing the most valuable part of the French empire. The colonial lobby that pushed for a French presence in Syria found the last view the easiest to propagate among the French

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[195] Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, pp. 58- 66.
[196] *L'Asie Française*, December 1918.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Raymond O'Zoux, *Les états du Levant Sous Mandat Français* (Paris: La Rose, 1931), p. 72.
[199] Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, pp. 52-53.
[200] Ibid.

public.[201] When this predominant view was translated into the political sphere, it led to strategies aimed at confronting and isolating Arab nationalism. Unlike the British in Iraq, who tried to contain Arab nationalism through accommodating the Sunni Muslim elite, the French relied on "minorities."[202] They postulated ideal types for each community on the basis of proneness to war, loyalty, ingenuity and discipline. They did not refrain from expressing their preference for Christians over Muslims, and for the peripheral minorities—Maronites, Alawites, Assyrians, Syriacs from Tour Abdin and Druze—over the Sunni Arabs in the coastal areas, urban centres and desert.[203] Relatively more moderate and conciliatory policies of what Albert Hourani calls "enlightened imperialism," that attempted to accommodate Arab nationalism under a benevolent mandate regime, did not gain the upper hand in Syria until the 1930s.[204] However, the sectarian de Caix perspective continued to be dominant until the 1930s, which—somewhat paradoxically—made the Arab nationalist ideology more attractive in the eyes of Syrian society. The territorial partitioning of Syria into administrative units was viewed with suspicion by the Syrian-Arab nationalists, and the French were accused of dividing the country and the nation (*inshiqaq*) for its own benefits. On the one hand, the nationalists were right in denouncing the French administrative and population policy as "divide and rule" through which the French succeeded in narrowing the space for anti-mandate political activism. Furthermore, by defining Syrian society as an aggregate of ethnic and religious communities, the French mandate obstructed the formation of a common national imaginary. However, as will be demonstrated in the Chapter 4, the divide and rule policy has also promoted the formation of a particular modern nationalist notion of territory and Syrianness. The role of French rule in shaping nationalist consciousness is not restricted to the fact that French domination in Syria became the a key symbol of oppression, nor the fact that the mandate period was a time of significant organisation and development among resistance movements; rather, the French imposed concrete socioeconomic and political conditions which influenced the formation of a nationalist imagination. French colonial rule formed the main reference point in the re-construction of social notions of religion, ethnicity and nation, as well as influencing the crystallization of concepts such as nation (*sha'b*), sect (*ta'ifa*), minority (*aqalliyya*) and homeland (*watan*). These notions continue to be re-

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[201] Ibid.
[202] Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under the French Mandate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 117.
[203] Pierre Fournié, "La représentation des particularismes ethniques et religieux en Syrie et au Liban a l'époque du mandate (1918-1946)", in Pascal Blanchard (ed.), *L'Autre et Nous, Scènes et Types* (Paris: Syros, 1995).
[204] Albert Habib Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon, A Political Essay* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 168.

constituted, over and over again. In the absence of a democratic public space in Syria, they are revealed through different means and embodied in different forms. Jazirans' (post) memories, with all their silences, gaps and stresses, are only one sign that the struggle to un/re-make the past is still going on.

The relation between the Arab nationalists and colonial rule was an ambiguous one, though. The Arab nationalist movement in French-Syria, though suffering heavily from factionalism, aspired to a *united* and *independent* Syria. Factionalism was partly due to personal rivalries, but was also related to the divergence of opinion, of ideological orientation, and of diplomatic and political strategy.[205] The Syrian-Palestine Congress, a Cairo-based political organization that was set up by Syrian exiles at a congress held in Geneva in 1921 gave way to three main factions within the Syrian independence movement in the early years of the mandate era. The *Istiqlali* branch of the Arab nationalist movement, headed by Adil Arslan was pan-Arabist, secular and anti-Hashemite, while Abdalrahman Shahbandar's *People's Party* was closer to the Hashemites, and was willing to cooperate with the British in order to achieve the more modest goal of the establishment of an independent Syria. A third group which had more Islamic overtones looked more to Saudi Arabia for support. It was headed by Shakib Arslan and Mohammad Rashid Rida.[206] The collapse of the Great Revolt in 1926, however, diluted whatever revolutionary appeal nationalism had acquired. Thanks to the change in French policy after the Great Revolt "in favour of diplomacy rather than the overt threat of continuous military domination,"[207] the Syrian nationalists were allowed to return to Syria and participate in political life, but this made it obvious to the nationalists that they had to play politics by the rules of the French High Commission.[208] This required the discrediting of the urban notables whom the French had originally supported, so as to open an independent space for nationalist politics; it also required embarking on fine diplomatic bargaining with the French. The near absence of direct confrontation in favour of *negotiation* with the colonial power is indeed a peculiar characteristic of the Syrian Arab nationalist movement in Syria.[209]

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[205] Philip *S.* Khoury*,* "Factionalism among Syrian Nationalists during the French Mandate,"International Journal of Middle East Studies, 13 (1981), pp. 441- 69.
[206] David Dean Commins, *Historical Dictonary of Syria*, (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2004), pp. 253- 254.
[207] Albert Hourani, "Revolution in the Arab Middle East," in PJ Vatikiotis (ed.), *Revolution in the Middle East and Other Case Studies* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972) p. 70.
[208] Philip Khoury rightly argues that the Arab nationalist movement in early 1920s was largely a movement in exile as nationalists were forced to flee from Damascus and other Syrian towns either to avoid death sentences or arrest. Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, p. 219 and 241.
[209] Philip Khoury's *Syria and the French mandate* describes the process of bargaining beteen the French and the Arab nationalist movement in a very detailed manner. This bargaining is also the underlying principle of the

High Commissar Ponsot's appointment as the successor to the liberal-minded Henry de Jouvenel (who had argued for the substitution of a treaty for the solution of the Syrian Question) forced the nationalists to defer their aspirations for a treaty along Anglo-Iraqi lines, the establishment of a national army, or the reunification of the minority-inhabited regions.[210] High Commissar Ponsot declared the continuation of the mandate, as well as a revised constitution for Lebanon, on October 1927. After a six-day conference in Beirut, the nationalists' response to Ponsot's declaration was the following notably non-revolutionary text:

> We are certain that in France the nation supports our national cause and desires to re-establish confidence between us. The sentiment of justice of the French people is evidence of this and we believe in the necessity of collaboration based on the reciprocity of interests and on the determination of mutual obligations.[211]

The same conference gave rise to the formation of a new nationalist political party, the National Bloc (*al-Kutla al-Wataniyya*), which would be the sole leading party throughout the mandate years until independence. The National Bloc was formally established in November 1931 at the Homs Congress. Although the Nationalist Bloc had diverse class support in the inner towns of Syria, its leadership was highly homogonous, comprising 90% Sunnis who were permanent residents of the Syrian inner towns, and who belonged either to the traditional landowning bureaucratic class or the landowning scholarly segments.[212] Their short term goal was to obtain a share in the governing of the country, a parliamentary form of government and a treaty with France. In line with the above note, they followed a policy of "honourable cooperation."[213]

The Refugee Issue: The Refugees and the French Refugee Politics

The refugee issue was one of the most arduous and controversial issues in post–World War I Levant, posing serious concerns not only for the governing colonial states, but also for

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"colonial civic space" that Elizabeth Thompson brilliantly elaborates in her book. Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2000).

[210] Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, p. 245.

[211] Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, p. 248, taken from Edmond Rabbath's unpublished manuscript Edmond Rabbath, *Courte histoire du mandat en Syrie et au Liban*, p. 52.

[212] Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, p. 250.

[213] Ibid., p. 251.

the displaced and the host populations.[214] This section will not exhaust the entire refugee issue since this would exceed the limits of this thesis, but will rather be selective in its coverage of the issue.

Aleppo became the main dispatch point for the survivors of the caravans arriving from Anatolia. Of the estimated 240,000 Armenian survivors, around 70,000 hid in and around Aleppo, and another 5,000 near Mosul, until the Ottoman Empire's retreat in late 1918. Approximately 60,000 Armenians later perished in the deserts of northern Syria and Mesopotamia alone.[215] Over 120,000 deportees accepted conversion to Islam to escape death. At the time of the Mudros Armistice, 30 October 1918, most Armenian survivors still hoped to return to their homelands as soon as the war was over. Over 150,000 deportees—including many of the forcibly converted—travelled to nearby Cilicia, which had by then come under French occupation.[216] However, the Armenian expectations of return to Cilicia were dashed by the fierce opposition from the emergent Turkish nationalist movement. When France evacuated Cilicia in late 1921, and the treaty of Lausanne completely ignored the Armenian concerns, there was a renewed mass exodus of Armenians from Cilicia.[217] The departing French were followed by tens of thousands of Armenians who had survived the deportations and massacres of World War I. Most of the embittered Armenian survivors who left Cilicia in late 1921 sought immediate shelter in French-Syria, Lebanon or Greece. Around 80,000 new refugees arrived in Syria and Lebanon by land or sea, and these were added to the Armenian deportees from 1915-1916 who had not managed to return to Cilicia, and to the old Armenian population (*al-arman al-qadim*) who had been living there for centuries and who had escaped mass deportation.[218] The vast majority of newcomers settled in the environs of Aleppo,

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[214] John Hope Simpson, *Refugees: Preliminary Report of a Survey* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1938).

[215] Raymond Kévorkian (ed.), "L'extermination des déportés arméniens ottomans dans les camps de concentration de Syrie-Mésopotamie (1915-1916): La deuxième phase du génocide," *Revue d'Histoire d'Arménienne Contemporaine* 2 (Numéro Spécial, 1998), pp. 10-14, 45-46, 60-61. According to Kévorkian, over 190,000 deportees were massacred in the Dayr al-Zor and also in the nearby city of Marqadah. These sites of group massacres have become places of pilgrimage for Armenians from all over the world.

[216] Ara Sanjian, "The Armenian Minority Experience", p. 152.

[217] After the termination of the war, until the 1930s, in a concerted effort by AGBU, the British Friends of Armenia Society, the Syrian Armenian Relief Cross, the League of Nations and the League of Nations special representative Karen Jeppe, around ten thousand Armenian orphans were collected from different parts of the empire and housed in orphanages run by Armenian or foreign missionary organizations. Vahram L. Shemmassian, "The Reclamation", pp. 110-40.

[218] For the Armenians of Aleppo during the genocide, see Hilmar Kaiser, in collaboration with Luther and Nancy Eskijian, *At the Crossroads of Der Zor: Death, Survival, and Humanitarian Resistance in Aleppo, 1915–1917* (London: Gomidas Institute: 2002).

Alexandretta and Beirut.[219] By the mid-1920s, there were about 100,000 Armenian refugees and orphans settled in Syria and 40,000 in Lebanon. Most of the Nestorian survivors took refuge in the region of Mosul or in Russia, while many Syriacs went to Syria, particularly Aleppo and the Syrian Jazira.

The CUP, and later the Turkish government, continued to introduce confiscatory measures, notably in April 1922 and on April 15, 1923, which stipulated that all the properties of non-Muslims who had left the country before the signing of the treaty of Lausanne would pass to the Turkish government.[220] The implementation of the Abandoned Properties Law of May 1915 was the first step in the process of distributing plundered Armenian wealth to local CUP loyalists.[221] Survivor memoirs, foreign reports and the Syrian press of the period reveal that by the end of 1922, during the negotiations of the Treaty of Lausanne, the forced expulsion of Christians and confiscation of their wealth had reached a level unparalleled since 1915. Several methods—from seizing the agricultural land, to forced-migration of non-Muslim peasants to the town centres, discrimination in the towns, exorbitant taxation and unofficial persecution in the form of economic boycotts, attacks in the press, beatings, robberies and killings by the local population—were employed to induce the local non-Muslim population to leave voluntarily.[222] The mandate authorities estimated that by 1923 approximately 200,000 Armenians had passed through Aleppo. Over 75,000 had settled in the province of Aleppo, with 50,000 in the city itself.[223] The population figures for non-Armenian Christian and Kurdish immigrants to French-Syria are very patchy. The tables in the

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[219] French withdrawal from Cilicia had devastating implications for the Cilician Armenian population as a whole. Considered as the second extermination (after the first one in 1915), French withdrawal from Cilicia did not leave much option to thousands of Armenians other than finding refuge in French-Syria. It created considerable disappointment among the Cilician Armenian population, as they had been promised the establishment of an autonomous Armenian state according to the Sèvres treaty. The Armenian National Delegation in Paris asked for the inclusion of at least Amanus (Cebel Bereket) into the French mandatory rule in accordance with the related statement stated in the Treaty of Sèvres so that the Armenian refugees of Cilicia, whose numbers exceeded 60,000, would find refuge. Surrendering Cilicia was also greeted with distaste by some Syrian Christians. They accused the French of renouncing their promises and abandoning their project of forming an autonomous Armenian state in Cilicia. Vahé Tachjian, *La France en Cilicie et en Haute Mésopotamie*, pp. 131-81.

[220] Levon Marashlian, "Finishing the Genocide, cleansing Turkey of Armenian survivors, 1920-1923," in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), pp. 113-45, see especially p. 116.

[221] Hilmar Kaiser, "Armenian Property, Ottoman Law and Nationality Policies during the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1916" in Olaf Farschid, Manfred Krop and Stephan Dähne (eds.), *The First World War as Remembered in the Countries of the Eastern Mediterranean* (Beirut: Orient Institute/Ergon Verlag, 2006), pp. 49-73; André N. Mandelstam, *Confiscation des Biens des Refugies Arméniens par le Gouvernement Turc* (Paris: Imprimerie Massis, 1929).

[222] Vahé Tachjian, "The expulsion of non-Turkish", p. 2.

[223] Marashlian, p. 136.

Appendix showing the population of the French Jazira gives an idea about the migration figures.

Every wave of immigration pushed for another wave of immigration among the survivors: Armenians from Urfa, the Syriac Orthodox (Jacobites) and Catholics, and Assyro-Chaldeans in the towns of Malatya, Diyarbakir, Urfa and Mardin; Arabic-speaking Greek Orthodox in the Cilician towns of Mersin and Tarsus; the few remaining Greek Catholics and Maronites in several Cilician towns arrived in Syria in the mid-1920s.[224]

The Sheikh Said Revolt and the ensuing Turkish military operations in the region was the decisive event that led the last remnants of the Armenian genocide, along with Christians from different denominations, to leave their homelands for the French Jazira. Those Armenians who had managed to survive under the protection of their Kurdish lords were hit by another wave of state violence, this time directed against the Kurds. A new wave of at least 10,000 Armenians from the rural areas of Diyarbekir, Mardin, Siirt, Cizre, Bitlis, Mardin, Şırnak and Cizre reached the French Jazira in 1929-30.[225] They were usually accompanied by their Kurdish fellows, who had escaped what is called in local usage the "*second ferman*," the Sheikh Said Revolt, after the first one, the Armenian Genocide. Subsequently, the other "undesirables"—Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic Syriacs from Tour 'Abdin and Mardin, Chaldeans, and Jews from Nusaybin— sought refuge in the French Jazira, escaping Turkish nationalist intimidation, harassment and other kinds of social and economic violence, and arriving in an extremely destitute state after 1926 (the population flow continued into the 1940s). Added to them were various Kurdish political activists who were escapingTurkey's authoritarian single-party regime'[226] The Syrian Orthodox patriarchate, which had been based at Dar al- Z'afaran near Mardin since 1506, was moved to Jerusalem in 1924, to Homs in

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[224] Vahé Tachjian, *La France en Cilicie et en Haute Mésopotamie*, pp. 217-42.
[225] Kevorkian, p. 20.
[226] The names of the Kurdish political refugees in 1930 in Syria are as follows: Hassan Hadjo Agha (chief of the Hewerkan tribe, refugee in Kubur al-Bid), Cemil Hadjo Agha (brother of Hasan Hadjo, mayor of Kubur al-Bid), Abdurrahman Agha (influential in Sassoun, refugee in Jazira), Rassoul and his brother Agit Agha (influential in Botan and Ain Diwar), Dr. Nouri (in Idlib, Alouite from Dersim), Osman Sabri (in Damascus, from Malatya, chef of the Mersini tribe), Kadri Can (refugee at Kuneitra, originally from Derik), Reshid Kurd (originally from Derik, refugee in Amouda), Abdurrahman Bey and his cousin Tahir Bey (refugees at Kikan in Jazira), Reshidi Alican and Suleyman Agha Seyidan (from Caucasus, refugees at Jazira), Dr. Mohammed Nafiz Bey (very influential among the youngsters, refugee at Kamishlié, originally from Maden Turkey), his brother Mohammad Nafez, Aref Abbas (little influence in Syria, refugee in Kamichlié, originally from Maden), Talat Bey Hadji Alibeyzade (refugee in Kamishlié, originally from Mardin), Reşit Bey Hadji Alibeyzade (the formers' brother in Kamishlié), Cigerxuin, (refugee in Amouda, Mella Ali of Topiz (with Cigerxuin they are atheist *mellas*), Mella Ahmed (refugee in Aindiwar, originally from Botan), Hamza Efendi (refugee in Hassatche, director of the school in Hassatache, originally from Miks), Memdouh Selim Bey (refugee in Hassatche, inspector of public instruction in Djeziréh), Abdelkerim Mella Sadek (refugee in Ain diwar), Mohammad Ali agha Sheikh Mus (refugee in Amouda), Hasan Hishyar (refugee in Amouda, originally from Lice), Sheikh Arif Brifkani (refugee in Aamouda, originally from Iraq. Institut Kurde, Rondot papers, Les Kurdes, p. 31.

1933, and to Damascus in 1959.[227] Assyrians from Iraq were added to these groups in 1933. Escaping from the massacres at the hands of the Kurds under the British mandate, they were settled on the banks of the Khabur.[228] The region also witnessed the gradual settlement of some Arab nomads, namely the Shammar and Tayy from the south whose old migration routes had been disturbed by the establishment of the Turco–Syrian border.[229] Even after the termination of the French mandate (1946), Syria still attracted seasonal migration from Tour 'Abdin, and today there are about 200,000 Syrian Orthodox living in Syria, 70 percent of whom have roots in Turkey.[230] This pattern changed with the founding of the United Arab Republic in 1958, when land reform redistributed property and changed the economic structure of Jazira.

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Anxious of the economic, social and political costs of settling the refugee populations in inner Syria or the frontier zone, the French authorities attempted to make a rational balance between the colonial interests, the interests of the refugees, the Syrian Arab nationalists and the political claims of the Turkish state. French diplomatic archives are full of reports drafted in 1920s about the refugee populations, especially Armenians, Kurds from Turkey and Assyrians from Iraq, and various settlement projects concerning these groups.

The "refugee problem" formed one of the most burning and hotly-debated issues among the Syrian Arab nationalists in 1920s, as well. It was one of the two major points through which the Syrian-Arab nationalist elites expressed their indignation towards the Ankara treaty (1921) formalizing the border between Turkey and French-Syria, namely the French surrender of some Syrian land to Turkey and the crowding of refugees into Syria. The political, social and economic impacts of the settlement of the refugee groups, in particular the Armenians, in inner Syrian cities had already started to be felt in the mid-1920s.[231] The division of Syria along ethnic and religious lines that aimed, as mentioned before, at isolating and containing the Arab nationalist movement, had already caused fervour among the Arab nationalists since

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[227]Anthony O'Mahony, "Syriac Christianity in the Modern Middle East", in Michale Angold (ed.), *The Cambridge History Of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 511-35. Syriac Orthodox resources, http://sor.cua.edu/Patriarchate/index.html.
[228] For the Iraqi-Assyrian refugees and the discussions about their settlement, see Longrigg, *Syria*, p. 213; Bayard Dodge, "The Settlement of Assyrians on the Khabur", *Journal of the Central Asian Society* 27 (1940), pp. 301-20; Longrigg, *Syria*, p. 213; Robert De Kelaita, "The Origins and Development of Assyrian Nationalism" (unpublished MA Thesis, University of Chicago, 2006), http://www.aina.org/books/oadoan.pdf.
[229] FO 371/13827, Pol. Eastern-Turkey, 1929, from Rendel to Eastern Department, December 9, 1929; for the population figures for Jazira in 1939, see Christian Velud, *Une Expérience*, pp. 522-26 and Vahé Tachjian, *La France en Cilicie et en Haute Mésopotamie*, p. 175
[230] Armbruster, *Securing the Faith*, p. 8
[231] Greenshields, *The Settlement*, p. 60.

early 1920s. Several articles in the nationalist press demanded regulation of the entrance of the "refugees" into Syria without regard for the ethnicity and the religion of the refugee group. Arguing that Syria had turned into a "whore," since refugees could freely enter the country, they insisted on the disciplining of the entrances to Syria. The refugee issue, then, was easily translated into a 'sovereignty deficit' among the Syrian-Arab nationalists. As well as this, the French refugee politics paved the way to the sectarian hostilities in Syria. The settlement of the last wave of Christian and Kurdish refugees and later of the Assyrians from Iraq in the late 1920s and early 1930s in north-eastern Syria was received with even more aggression by the Arab nationalists. It was denounced as "violating the national sanctity of Syria."

The French mandatory authorities thus had to be vigilant in settling the newcomers, observing the delicate balance between their colonial economic interests and the financial, social and political costs of settlement in Syria. They had to deal with the refugee issue without running into a deep crisis of legitimacy, both in the eyes of the Muslim majority and the local and newly arriving Christian groups in the country. Justifying its colonial presence in Syria and Lebanon as the protectors of Christians, and legitimizing its colonial rule in terms of the "*mission civilisatrice*," the mandate authorities had to avoid increasing anxiety among the Syrian Arab nationalists in their refugee and religious politics.

Nevertheless, the Armenian refugees were granted Syrian citizenship and acknowledged as one of the official sects among fourteen others in September 1924, after the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne on July 24, 1923.[232] They were accorded citizenship in 1924, according to Article 30 of the Treaty of Lausanne which reads: "Turkish subjects habitually resident in territory which in accordance with the provisions of the present treaty is detached from Turkey will become ipso facto in the conditions laid down by the national law, nationals of the state to which such territory is transferred."[233] In 1928, French High Commissioner Henri Ponsot affirmed that Armenian refugees residing in Syria had the right to vote in the Constitutional Assembly election—this was a year in which the French were trying to assure as large a Christian vote possible, against the political power of the National Bloc.[234] Relief, food programmes and settlement schemes were offered in particular to the Armenian refugees by several missionary organizations, as well as the French mandatory authorities.

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[232] Until the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, the peoples residing in the territories controlled by the French, including the Armenians, had maintained the legal status of Ottoman citizens. Nicola Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia*, pp. 52-55.
[233] Uri Davis, "Citizenship Legislation in the Syrian Arab Republic", *Arab Studies Quarterly* 1 (1996), pp. 1-15.
[234] Stephen Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon*, p. 181.

The French refugee policy is best characterised by its hesitant settlement policy in Jazira which played a significant role in attracting the impoverished refugees to the latter region starting from the end of 1920s. Chapter 3 will present a detailed account of the process of how the latecomer refugee peasants from Turkey were settled in villages along the Turco-Syrian border between the towns of Ra‘s al ‘Ayn and Jazira bin ‘Omar[235] and treated differently depending on their religion.

The making of the French Jazira followed the main lines of the French colonial economic policy: that is, opening up this frontier region to cultivation through implanting Christian and Kurdish refugees, conceived as the future peasants of the region. However, it was in principle the non-Armenian Christians and non-Kurds who were settled in the 50 km breadth of the frontier region thanks to constant warnings from the Turkish Foreign Ministry. Such a settlement scheme by the French was promoted for political and economic ends: the region populated by pro-French loyalists would function as a buffer zone both against the Turkish nationalists in Turkey and against the Syrian Arab nationalists.

Among the refugees and the nomadic Arab and Kurdish tribal population, the Christians were privileged because the French authorities perceived them as characterised by a hard-working attitude, loyalty and open-mindedness.[236] The refugees, in particular the Christians, were recruited into the local military forces. The urban elites from among the Christian refugees or usually the Kurdish elites who fled from Mardin to the French Jazira, claiming their “off-shore investments” following the delimitation of the Turco–Syrian border, would be made pro-French by awarding them administrative posts and economic gains. The political economy of the new settlement schemes, as well as the colonial politics of difference which were skewed in favour of the Christian population in Jazira, would gradually entail the formation of sectarian loyalties.

Lieutenant Terrier, the intelligence chef of the district (*caza*) of Kherou (the district was later transferred to Qamishli) had been cognizant of the potential of the Kurds in the colonization project of Jazira and in the resolution of frontier disputes with Turkey since 1924.[237] He immediately introduced himself as partaking in the welcoming of Kurdish refugees and cultivating good relations with their leaders, the most distinguished one being

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[235]Richard Hovannisian, “The Ebb and Flow of Armenian Minority in the Arab Middle East,” *Middle East Journal* 1 (Winter 1974), p. 16.
[236] CADN, Fonds Beyrouth, Cabinet Politique 569, Père Poidebard, Situation des refugies en Haute Djézireh, October 1927, no. 327/K2.
[237] CADN, Fonds Beyrouth, Cabinet Politique, no. 549, Report of Lieutenant Terrier, Qamishli, 11 August 1926.

Hadjo Agha, the leader of the multi-religious Hevêrkan tribe.[238] The French Jazira as a Kurdish refuge caused extreme apprehension among the Turkish ruling elites about the formation of a Franco-Kurdish appeasement. The Turkish state's anxiety regarding the possibility of Franco-Kurdish appeasement was indeed due to the formation of an "enclave of undesirables," in particular Armenians and Kurdish political refugees, outside of its control, just to the immediate south of its border in Jazira. A constant topic of the French intelligence reports, telegrams and high-level correspondences of the years between 1925 and 1927 is the complaints of the Turkish state to the French authorities about trans-border incursions of Kurds and the settlement of Armenians along the Turkish–Syrian frontier. The French are condemned for providing protection for the Kurdish rebels and assisting in the Armenian colonization of the frontier. The French diplomatic archive in Nantes contain thousands of documents about the Turkish complaints concerning border attacks by some rebellious Kurdish tribes residing in Jazira and the installation of "malicious elements"—the Armenians—in the frontier zone. In a letter dated 27 January 1925, the French described the Turkish allegations about the colonisation of the frontier by Armenians as mistaken and exaggerated:

> Since the beginning of the armistice, the biggest problem that the mandatory power is trying to resolve is the refugee problem. We have received 96,450 refugees since then and they are all impoverished people. France has made great economic sacrifices for them. Just for the sake of reliving pressure on the north of Syria, we have settled two-thirds of these poor people in inner Syria. The rest reside in Aleppo and in the Sanjak of Alexandretta and their settlements were realized calmly and in deference to the Muslim population.[239]

Nevertheless, the French central authorities were already aware of the need for disciplining the refugee flow. In a report drafted after the outbreak of the Sheikh Said Revolt and entitled "du passage en Syrie des populations Kurdes ou Chrétiens ou des déserteurs Turcs," High Commissar Sarrail proposed to organize the rules of taking refuge in Syria.[240] Despite the pragmatic approach of the High Commissariat, the local French officers still had scope to act on their own initiative regarding the arrival of the refugees. Thanks to the Terrier plan, the founding of the Kurdish nationalist political organization, Xoybun, in 1927 was "tolerated." Xoybun was the main organization behind the Ararat Revolt in Turkey in 1930. It lobbied for greater cultural and political autonomy in Syria; however, most of its demands—

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[238] Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, pp. 101-4.
[239] MAE, Série Syrie-Liban, vol. 177, Relation Turquie- Française.
[240] CADN, Fonds Beyrouth, Cabinet Politique, Box 572, Service des Renseignements, Service Central, No. 868/K.S., 5 March 1925, Beyrouth.

such as the establishment of Kurdish language schools, recognition of Kurdish as an official language, and the appointment of Kurdish administrators in Kurdish areas—were rejected by the French, and one of its leading figures, Adiyaman-born poet and political acitivist Osman Sebrî, was sent into exile to Madagascar.[241] Still, several Kurdish political refugees from Turkey continued their political-cultural-literary activities from their refuges in French-Syria. The High Commissariat in Beirut became more responsive to the demands by the Turkish Foreign Ministry after the 1930s, at a time when the Terrier plan had gradually come to fade away. This mostly concerned the Kurdish refugees. In one of the significant reports, entitled "Refugiés Kurdes," written by the delegate of the High Commissariat in Dayr al-Zor in response to a request by two significant (political) Kurdish tribal leaders and 90 families for refuge in Syria, he proposed strict measures be taken such that the "the leaders who are susceptible to provocations will not be settled in the 50 km frontier zone and will be immediately sent to Damascus; one family will not be given more than four arms and any person wanted by the Turkish government for criminal acts or have offences in the common law will not be accepted as a refugee."[242]

In short, concerning the refugee issue the French mandatory state did not adopt a homogenous strategy, and their attitude at times differed between the central and the local authorities. The French refugee policyintersected with other political, economic, diplomatic and social concerns.

French Religious Politics

The colonial encounter between the French and the newly arriving multi-ethnic and multi-religious population in the French Jazira took place against a background of violent discord and resulting differentiation between the Christians and Kurds during and after the Turkish *fermans* of 1915 and 1925. The memories of these clashes were carried over into the new refuge. It is clear that the norms of morality of communal coexistence had been greatly disturbed by the state-sponsored massacres. As World War I and the massacres were experienced in their most violent forms in the south-eastern part of today's Turkey, the region where most of the Jazirans originate from, traditionally shared and mutual commitments

[241] Jordi Tejel, "The Terrier Plan and the Emergence of a Kurdish Policy Under the French Mandate in Syria, 1926-1936," *International Journal of Kurdish Studies*, 2007.
[242] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Box 572, Service des Renseignements de l'Euphrate, no.3720/D.Z., du General du brigade Calais Délègue Adjoint de Haut Commissaire pour le Sandjak de Deir ez Zor à Monsieur le Ministre Plénipotentiaire Délègue de Haut Commissaire Auprès de l'état Syrie, Damas, Deir ez Zor, 22 August 1930.

between the Christian and the Muslim/Kurdish groups on the basis of neighbourhood were deeply impaired.

Significantly, however, the predication of groups on religious distinctions as self-evident entities and the institutionalization of religion as a distinctive marker of political, economic and social status date back to the French mandate period. In the pre-genocide world, religion played the most significant role in differentiating these two groups, the Kurds and the Christians, yet these religious affiliations were enmeshed in other "competing discourses of obedience, allegiances and loyalty inherent in local society."[243]

French rule reshaped and redefined the existing difference that accrued from the late Ottoman times. The relationship between the French and the newcomer local actors was 'an unequal dialogue' which worked through the refashioning of local religious and ethnic differences. The French ethno-religious politics in Syria confirms Martin Thomas's claim regarding the French Empire that "a republican state founded on hostility to hereditary practices relied on tribal chiefs and colonial monarchs to maintain order in vast swathes of the empire. The anticlerical republicans committed to secular education in France defended France's continued reliance on missionary educators in rudimentary colonial school systems."[244] Despite the fact that French communal politics was characterised by important elements of continuity with the Ottoman *millet* system, the change in the politics and ideology of the colonial state in the post-Wilsonian world of nation-states led to an important difference in the everyday experience of inter-communal relations in comparison with Ottoman times.

The two main mechanisms through which the Christian communities in Syria re-formed their communal freedom and autonomy under the mandate rule were the Personal Status Law, and the confessional system in political representation which maintained quotas of participation for politically recognized ethno-religious groups.[245] Alongside this, the Christians' high level of recruitment into public services and the army, intended to immunize these bodies against Arab national politics, and the fact that many French officials in Syria felt at more ease with Christians whom they regarded as more "intelligent and open-minded," triggered the formation of a culture of sectarianism. Education was another area in which this process was manifest. The French aimed to solidify the "religious communities" by granting

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[243] Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, p. 36.
[244] Martin Thomas, *The French Empire between the Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 6.
[245] Article 37 of the 1930 constitution stated what the electoral law would provide for confessional minorities (*minorites religieuses*).

them a considerable amount of freedom in organizing schools. By the early 1930s, Armenian schools were present in nearly all the cities and villages that had a considerable Armenian population.[246] By providing the necessary conditions for social and political activism, these schools enabled Armenian refugees to dominate the Armenian political scene in Syria in the 1930s.[247] The religious freedom and autonomy enjoyed by the state-recognised religious sects (*ta'ifa*) was guaranteed by the Personal Status Law. The main legislative effort to regulate the state-communities came with the promulgation of the Syrian constitution in 1930. This strengthened the political position of the Christian communities by formalizing political confessionalism and prescribing that the electoral law must ensure the representation of "religious minorities."[248] The 1936 document (Article 4) established a procedure to grant legal personality to religious communities. According to Decision 20 of March 13, 1936, and subsequent to its slight alteration in Decision 146 of November 18, 1938, the French mandatory state recognized the following historical communities: Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Melchite Catholic, Gregorian Armenian Orthodox, Catholic Armenians, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Assyrian Chaldean Patriarchate, Nestorian, Chaldean, the Latin Church and the Protestant Church; the recognised Muslim communities were the Sunni, Shiite Jafari, Alawite, Ismaili and Druze. The Jews were recognized as a separate sect.

Post-Independence: Alien Infiltrators, Autochthones and Loyal Citizens (1946–)

The Arabization policies in the economic and political spheres, which commenced with the UAR and continued more strictly under the Ba'th rule, changed the socioeconomic structure of the elite-dominated sectarian system in the French Jazira.[249] Land reform in the form of land distribution in post-independence Syria was the most significant "hush money" distributed to the Jaziran rural population, both Kurds and Christians. These populist developmentalist policies were a hard blow to the Francophile elites of the French Jazira,

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[246] Nicola Migliorino, "'Kulna Suriyyin'? The Armenian Community and the State in Contemporary Syria," *REMM* 115-116, pp. 97-115.
[247] Ibid., p. 103.
[248] Nicola Migliorino, (*Re)constructing Armenia*, p. 58. For the Syrian constitution of 1930, article 37, see G. H. Torrey, *Syrian Politics and the Military, 1945-1958* (Colombus: Ohio University Press, 1964), p. 156.
[249] The Ba'th military coup took place in March 1963, one month after a Ba'th takeover in neighbouring Iraq. From 1966 to 1970 the faction of radical officers who then had the upper hand promoted strict economic nationalization in many domains. The internal coup by Hafiz al-Asad in November 1970 initiated instead a turn towards an "economic opening," or the first *infitah*, as it has been called. See Volker Perthes, *The Political Economy of Syria under Asad*, (London/NY: I.B.Tauris, 1995).

many of whom had already transplanted their economic wealth and cultural capital to Lebanon or Western Europe.

As far as the 'privileged Christian communities' of colonial rule are concerned, the post-independence regimes as a whole attempted to de-politicize the colonial difference and transform the ethnic and religious groups in the country into the state's "religio-cultural" communities.[250] State intervention in education, language, social and communal activities, and political organizations were the main tools to achieve this end. Jaziran Christians remember the United Arab Republic (1958-1961) with extreme disfavour, as the hegemony of the Christian population during the French mandate period was deeply threatened. Starting from the Shishakli rule, the education reforms of the post-independence regimes were a hard blow to the autonomy of the Christian schools, primarily in terms of the freedom over curriculum and language that they enjoyed during the French mandate period. The Ministry of Education prescribed programmes to the Armenian and Syriac private schools; Arabic was recognized as *the* language in correspondence and education.[251] While the pre-Ba'th rule had maintained special provisions that accommodated the educational needs of the Armenians, the state decided to take control of and nationalize all private education establishments on September 25, 1967, after the 9th National Congress of the Ba'th party.[252] The state seized and confiscated some Armenian and Syriac private schools, although partial control was regained after a difficult mediation process: *solely*, however, for the Armenian private schools. They were integrated into a state-centred educational system, they dropped their Armenian names and adopted Arabic ones, and government-appointed inspectors were put in charge.[253] The UAR rule abolished the Ottoman Law of Association (1909), which had continued to regulate the associations in post-independence Syria, and replaced it first with the Egyptian Law (1956) and later Syrian Law 93 of 1958. The law introduced severe restrictions on the autonomy of associations. The final Associations Law of 1969, which is still in effect, introduced further restrictions and furnished the state with extra power to intervene and control their activities. The unstable political atmosphere and the above-mentioned

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[250] For discussion of how the Ba'th top-down version of Syrian Arab nationalism shaped the ethno-cultural identity of the Syrian society, see Stéphane Valter, *La Construction Nationale Syrienne, Légitimation de la Nature Communautaire du Pouvoir par le Discours Historique* (Paris, CNRS Editions: 2002).
[251] Nicola Migliorino, "*'Kullna Suriyyun'? The Armenian Community and the State in Contemporary Syria*" , *REMM*, p. 105.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Nicola Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia*, pp. 101-115. Ara Sanjian, "The Armenian Minority Experience in the Modern Arab World," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-faith studies* 3, no. 1, pp. 149-79.

developments together with the ban on non-Arabic (political) newspapers caused the emigration of Armenian, Kurdish and Syriac cultural elites to Lebanon.

The Ba'th party, once in power in 1963, was no less determined to dominate the political sphere and govern all vibrant social and cultural spaces, be they communal or—even more importantly—trans-communal. As for ethno-religious issues, official Ba'th policy, as expressed in the Constitution of 1973, was to strictly forbid the "incitation to religious strife" (*ithara al-naza'at al-ta'ifiyya*). The mention of religious distinctions in public discourse automatically invoked suspicions of "sectarianism" (*ta'ifiyya*), a taboo topic due to its associations with politics; but there has been a growing *de facto* sectarianization of the state since the 1963 Ba'th coup d'état, and especially since Asad's Corrective Movement of 13 November 1970.[254] Important positions in the army, bureaucracy and the public sector are staffed by Alawis, who comprise 11.5 percent of the population.[255] Hinnebusch points out the class/state–linked role of the Alawi sect and argues that the Alawis as a sect played the role of "class vanguard, then shield of state formation," and more recently have appeared as spearheads of "embourgeoisement and restratification."[256] The corruption, nepotism and enormous enrichment characteristic of the ruling elites is set against a background of the economic, social and cultural impoverishment of the rest of the society.

As mentioned above, the post-independence regimes have tried to curb both political and cultural differences. The Ba'th rule after the Corrective Movement, however, has tended to fine tune the *difference* through culturalist sectarianism and the official discourse of harmony, i.e. a discourse of the harmonious coexistence of different faiths in the country.[257] It tolerated "religious difference" as long as it was devoid of any political connotation and as long as public space is unstained by any kind of communal manifestation. Religious difference, then, is viewed as legitimate by the state as long as it is unpoliticized and culturalized, and as long as is situated within self-defined and closed sects which stay unmixed with others. Any religious or communal manifestation has to be absent from the public spaces that are central in the construction of national Arab identity. They are allowed to function only inside the

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[254] The Corrective Movement is a coup d'état launched by Hafiz al-Assad against the neo-Ba th regime headed by Salah al-Jadid. It is called the Corrective Movement by Assad himself because he claimed that he intended to amend the excesses of the previous regime of Salah al-Jadid.
[255] Van Dam, p. 1.
[256] Raymond Hinnebusch, "Class and State in Bat'hist Syria," in Richard Antoun and Donald Quataert (eds.), *Syria: Society, Culture and Polity* (NY: SUNY, 1991), pp. 46-47; Volker Perthes, "The Bourgeoisie and the Ba'th," *Middle East Report*, May-June, 1991, pp. 31-37; Elizabeth Longuenesse, "The Class Nature of the State in Syria," *MERIP Reports* 77 (May 1979), pp. 3-11.
[257] Hanna Malik, a*l-Ahwal al-Shahsiyya wa Mahakimuha, al-Tawa'f al-Masihiyya fi Suriyya wa Lubnan* [Personal status and its courts, Christian sects in Syria and Lebanon] (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar lil-Nashr, 1972), pp. 48-57.

framework of communal institutions, that is, the churches.[258] Ethnic difference, however, has never been incorporated into the hegemonic rule through culturalizing it, and the Kurds are considered as members of the Sunni-Muslim sect. Not only is Kurdish ethnicity denied, but a large proportion of the Jaziran Kurds are devoid of basic existential recognition. The Kurdish issue is one of the most outstanding problems, along with the Islamists, that disturbs the "sectarian balance" (*tawazun ta'ifi*) underlying the culturalist sectarian system in Syria.[259]

The goal of achieving sectarian balance assumes the presence of inequality between sects, and also rests on the idea that each sect should remain within its own borders, unmixed with the others. The state closely monitors both the communities and the boundaires between the communities, so as to prevent the formation of a *common* and *oppositionary* political space crosscutting ethnicities and religions. Just as much as it harshly suppresses any sort of oppositional political activity in Syria, the state also constantly checks any kind of communal formation transcending the limits of officially recognized ethno-religious categories. Any communal formation outside the boundaries of the officially recognized institutions, such as the church or other Christian cultural centres, is restricted. Assyrianist political parties, which usually have Iraqi and diaspora connections, are under constant monitoring. The state's repressive measures against politics which takes place outside the official domains—in other words, its politics of difference—also prevents joint *independent* action, whether social, cultural or otherwise, between different communities. When a political group of Assyrianist-Syriacs cooperated with a Kurdish group over a local issue—perhaps the first instance of such cooperation since their experience of comradeship in the Syrian Communist party—they were marginalized and protested against by the church and the officials and notables of the Syriac community. This proves that any sort of political and social rapprochement between these two groups is highly opposed by the state, and its religious and secular guardians inside the community.

The ethno-religious politics of the Ba'th party varies for each group depending on its population and political and economic power. Here lies the "controlled tension" principle of sectarian rule in Syria. Regarding the Arabic-speaking Sunni Muslims, who comprise 57.4% of the population, the constitution of 1973 prescribed that the President should be a

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[258] Panagiotis Geros, *When Christianity Matters: The Production and Manipulation of Communalism in Damascus, Syria* (Unpublished PhD dissertation, SOAS, 2007), p. 75.
[259] The phrase "sectarian balance" is employed by Yassin al-haj Salih to denote the sectarian tension created and controlled by the state. See al-Haj Salih, "al-ta'iffiyya," p. 41.

Muslim.[260] This concession should be seen as a tactic by Hafiz al-Asad to incorporate the Islamist opposition, which one can hardly argue was successful. As for the Druze, their religious leader, the *shaykh al-'aql*, is recognized by the state; as well as this, the Druze are represented in the political system as a *muhafaza* (a province), sending six deputies to parliament.[261] As for the Christian population, which comprises nearly 9-10% of the Syrian population and nearly 20% of the Jaziran population, their involvement with high politics is rather marginal: they avoid participating as a group, and, as the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Christians put it, "they prefer the private sector."[262] Currently there are four Christian ministers in the government. At the beginning of the 2000s, only about 400 Armenians were members of the Ba'th party;[263] nevertheless, Bashar al-Asad's personal tailor and technician are Armenians. Christians never appear in key posts such as the secret services, special police, or army units. The Christians are recruited as assistants or counsellors, in roles such as the speaker of the presidential palace, the auxiliary to the minister of oil, the director-general of the ministry of finance, and the director-general of foreign trade. Nevertheless, the intelligence officers can freely enter and leave the churches, and a spare room is reserved for their "intelligence enquiries."

More importantly, Christians maintained a large degree of autonomy in terms of Personal Status Law issues (*qanun al-ahwal al-shakhsiyya*). Such cases were tried by the communal "Spiritual Courts" (*al-mahakim al-ruhiyya*). Thanks to the Personal Status Law issues regarding marriage, inheritance, divorce and child custody among Christians are not subjected to the national legal system, but to the Spiritual Courts that each church possesses.

Christians need to obtain authorization to repair churches or build new ones, to pray or have processions in public without harassment. Friday is the official holiday, but work starts at 10 a.m. on Sundays. All the Christian holidays are official state holidays, and members of the clergy are excused from military service.[264]

At the end of 1974, the Christian schools were allowed to reopen. In practice, the state had by then already secured control, appointing their directors and imposing the state's

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[260] Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (LA, University of California Press, 1990), p. 173*)*.
[261] Birgit Schaebler, "Identity, Power and Piety: The Druzes in Syria," *ISIM Newsletter* 7 (2001), p. 25.
[262] Monsignor Hazim, Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Christians, quoted in the Beirut journal, *L'Orient-le Jour*, June 13, 2000, taken from R. J. Mouawad, "Syria and Iraq, Repression, Disappearing Christians of the Middle East", *Middle East Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2001), http://www.meforum.org/17/syria-and-iraq-repression.
[263] Ara Sanjian, 2001.
[264] Mouawad, "Syria and Iraq."

curriculum and books.[265] Even the registration of Muslim students in Christian schools, which was a common practice for the children of the Muslim elite, was now regulated with a quota by the state, in an attempt to avert the cultivation of sectarianism.

Churches administer a wide network of associations, such as youth groups, scouts, women's and charity associations, as well as communal institutions such as hospitals, orphanages, or homes for the elderly. However, together with the regime's culturalist sectarian discourse and the near-absence of any social and political space autonomous from the state, institutions have also elevated the power of the churches. Accordingly, the relative autonomy enjoyed by the Christians results in a very tight control being exercised by each church upon their communities. The churches are obliged to keep records of their members which are then monitored by the Syrian secret services. Similarly, the churches themselves act as state-churches, and those in Jazira especially are extremely apprehensive about spoiling their religious and cultural activities with any kind of politics.[266] They have emerged as the sole institution representing their sect in social and religious issues. This is a relationship of mutual dependency, and through it, the regime can police the church constituency.

The culturalist-sectarian discourse in the state's appeal to the Christians (in particular the Syriacs) has become more obvious during Bashar al-Asad's rule (2001–). In his speech welcoming Pope John Paul II in April 2001, he stated that Syria had been a place of old civilizations, Christianity being one of them. In order to demonstrate the regime's religious tolerance, he continued as follows: "Syria has an important role as a safeguard of Christianity. Syria has always protected the Christians. St. Peter and other Christian Missionaries set out for abroad from Syria to teach justice and equality."[267] The Christian presence in the country, then, is used to signify the state's tolerance towards the religious minorities and the harmonious coexistence in the country. A postage stamp issued by the state in 2000 depicting a church next to a mosque with the title that reads as "Islam and Christianity, 2,000 years of Fraternity," is an illustration of this state discourse of harmony.[268]

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[265] Panagiotis Geros, p. 74, quoted in M. L. Noujaim and C. Therbault, "Des Eglises dans la Ville", in Anne-Marie Bianquis and Elizabeth Picard (eds.), *Damas: miroir brisé d'un Orient arabe* (Paris: Autrement, 1993), pp. 190-1; Nicola Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia*, pp. 121, 164.
[266] The cultural centre of the Armenian Dashnak party, originally named *Hamazkayin* before it was Arabized to *Jamaiyya a-taraqqi wa al-Thaqafi*, was able to organize a screening of a documentary on the 1915 Armenian genocide at which the priests from all Christian sects, as well as state and intelligence officers of the city and the community members, could participate—but notably without the participation of Kurdish residents of the city.
[267] Taken from Noriko Sato, "On the Horns of the Terrorist Dilemma," *History and Anthropology* 14, no. 2 (2003), pp. 141-55, see especially p. 151.
[268] Panagiotis Geros, p. 76.

Despite the fact that the Christians seem to have lost many of the economic and social privileges that they enjoyed under the French mandate, the Ba'th regime has guaranteed them a significant degree of "cultural-religious freedom" and privileges in exchange for the economic losses.[269] In line with Mouawad, I argue that such a politics represents the need of the regime to broaden its support, to secure the support of Christian minorities, and disrupt a potential oppositional front that could be supported by religious idioms, the most powerful of which is the Islamist movement.[270]It should be added that in the Jaziran context, the religious idiom is replaced by the (Kurdish) ethnic idiom.

In addition to this, the Syrian state represents itself as the protector of the religious minorities. Brutal repression of the Muslim Brotherhood by the military in 1980, rumours of "Islamic vandalism" and the intolerance of the state authorities towards any kind of "religious extremism," foster the idea that the Syrian authorities are safeguarding the security and safety of Christians against the "Muslim fanatics."[271] The image of "Muslim fanatics" in the inner Syrian cities is transformed into one of "Kurdish fanatics" in Jazira. Consequently, the Syrian state positions itself as the protector of the Jaziran Christians against those who would (potentially) disturb the harmonious coexistence in the country, i.e. the Kurds.

There are indeed privileges granted to Christians within the repressive political structures of the Syrian state, under which the Jaziran Kurds suffer the most. This privileged situation stands in clear and radical contrast to that of their fellow townspeople, the Kurds, and also to the prevailing conditions for their co-religionists in present-day Turkey. These differences foster the hegemonic idea among the Christian establishment that the Syrian regime is indeed the protector of the Christians thanks to the relative freedom granted to them.

Christian establishments immediately reciprocate these privileges granted to them. (As the coming chapters will demonstrate, the reciprocal relationship is revealed through the post-memories in different ways.) The most "generous" Christian sect in terms of reciprocity is the Syriac Orthodox Christians, which also forms the majority of the Christians in Jazira. During a meeting on September 26, 2007 with Rowan Williams, England's Archbishop of Canterbury, Patriarch Ignatius IV Hazim of Antioch and All the East for Roman Orthodox in Syria underlined that "Syria is the cradle of Christianity and that the Bible was written in the

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[269] Nazih Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab state: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: Tauris, 2001), p. 265.
[270] Mouawad, "Syria and Iraq."
[271] Salam Kawakibi, "L'immigration des Chrétiens de Syrie," *EUI-RSCAC-CARIM* (European University Institute, Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies, Consortium Euro-méditerranéen pour la Recherche Appliquée sur les Migrations Internationales), notes d'analyse et de synthèse, 2008/2.

Syrian Aramaic language."[272] Patriarch Ignatius IV Hazim added that "Syria lives a pioneering national unity among citizens of Islamic and Christian religions," expressing his admiration for the spirit of tolerance, amity and progress which Syria enjoys.[273]It was the former Syriac Patriarch Mor Ignatious Yacoub III who first adopted the strategy of associating the ancient Christians in Syria with the present-day Syriac Christians.[274] This has become the official view of the Syriac Orthodox Church and the establishment in present-day Syria. According to this argument, which has been widely adopted by the Jaziran Syriacs, the roots of the Syriacs in geographical Syria link them to the Aramean Empire, which provides today's Syriacs with a language, liturgy and literature that is 1,800 years old. The Aramaist stance emphasizes their Christian roots, arguing that the Semitic Arameans underwent a change of name after they embraced Christianity, and were then called "Syriacs."[275] Thanks to its Semitic and non-ethnic religious references, the Aramaist argument is promoted both by the Syriac Orthodox Church establishment and the Syrian state.

The second view on the origins of the Syriacs is that the Syriacs, Chaldeans and Assyrians form one single ethnic-based nation and are the descendants of the ancient Assyrian Empire which flourished in Northern Iraq in the first millennium BC.[276] The Assyrian Democratic Organization, founded in 1957, has been the main organization behind the nationalist ideology of Assyrianism. Accused of "rounding up the Christians of three different

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[272] "Patriarch Hazim meets England's Canterbury Archbishop, holds Iftar Banquet", *Ankawa*, 27 September 2007, http://www.ankawa.com/english/?p=397.

[273]Ibid.

[274] Yacoub III, H.H. Mor Ignatius, *The Syrian Orthodox Church - Its Name: The "Syrian"*, Online: http://home.lizzy.com.au/noohro/syr/details/name.htm. The Syrian Orthodox Church Of Antioch By H.H. Mor Ignatius Yacoub III, Patriarch Of Antioch And All The East, The Supreme Head Of The Universal Syrian Orthodox Church For the Period 1957-1980.

[275] *Aramnahrin* http://www.aramnahrin.org/English/index_en.htm. John Joseph, "Assyria and Syria: Synonymous?" *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 11, no. 2 (1997), pp. 37–43, Online: http://www.jaas.org/edocs/v11n2/JohnJoseph.pdf. A. Tvedtnes, "The Origin of the Name 'Syria'," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 40 [1981]: 139-40), http://www.aramnaharaim.org/English/assyrians1.htm. Stéphane Valter, *La Construction Nationale Syrienne*, pp. 159-63 and 180-87. Two outstanding figures of the pro-Aramaic stance in Syria are Samir 'Abdeh and Jozef Asmar Malki. Samir 'Abdeh, *Al-Suryan Qadiman wa Hadithan* (Amman: Dar al-Shuruq lil-Nashr wal-Tawzi', 1997); Samir 'Abdeh, *Suryan wa lakin Suriyyun* (Damascus: Dar Hasan Malas lil-Nashr, 2002); Jozef Asmar Malki, *min Nisibin ila Zalin (al-Qamishli)* (Damascus: Dar al-'Alm, 1995).

[276] The Assyrian Democratic Organization, founded in Qamishli 1957, was the main organization behind the idea of Assyrianism. Richard N. Frye, "Assyria and Syria: Synonyms," *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 11, no. 2. http://www.jaas.org/edocs/v11n2/frye.pdf. The most elaborate article on the issue that describes the political implications of each stance is Wilfred Alkhas, "Neo-Assyrianism & the End of the Confounded Identity," 8 August 2006, http://www.nineveh.com/NeoAssyrianism%20&%20the%20End%20of%20the.html; Richard N. Frye, "Assyria and Syria: Synonyms" *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 40 (1981), pp. 30-36. See also Fred Aprim, "The Assyrian Cause and the Modern Aramean Thorn," 19 December 2004 http://www.fredaprim .com/pdfs/2004/Aramean%20Drive.pdf; Assyrian Democratic Organization, http://www .bethsuryoyo.com/; the Assyrian International News Agency, http://www.aina.org/aol/lang1.html; other useful sources for background to this issue include: http://www.nineve.com/, http://www.assyrianamericanleague.org/, http://www .assyrianlanguage.com, http:// www.assyrian-language.com/, http://www.learnassyrian.com/aramaic/.

churches and ethnicising religious belongings," Assyrianism is fervently opposed by the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Chaldean church and also by the Syrian state, as this ethnic identification fundamentally challenges the official recognition of the Syrian-Syriac community as an (Arab) religious community. The Assyrianist idea of the unity of Syriacs, Chaldeans and Assyrians is influential among the Syriacs in Jazira, at least rhetorically; however, large sections of the Syriac population prefer to avoid the political implications of this religiously-moderate view.

The Kurdish issue

This section will briefly describe the twofold nature of the Kurdish issue which accrues from the unequal sectarian system and the populist authoritarian Arab nationalist rule in Syria.

The Kurds form the biggest non-Arab ethnic group in Syria, at 9-10% of the population, yet are counted as "Sunni Muslims" within the confessional map of the Syrian state.[277] The promise of post-independence populist policies was immediately abrogated for the Kurds through bans on public usage of Kurdish, which were followed in 1958 with several other repressive measures under the United Arab Republic (UAR). The UAR regime fired hundreds of Kurdish military officers, including the army chief of staff General Tawfiq Nizamaddin, and closed police and military academies to Kurdish applicants.[278] In 1957, the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria (KDPS) was founded by Osman Sebrî, among other Kurdish intellectuals and politicians such as Abdulhamid Haj Darwish, Nureddin Zaza, Reşid Hamo as well as the renowned poet Cigerxwîn.[279] It called for the recognition of Kurdish national rights, economic progress and an end to the marginalization of Kurds in the administration. In 1960, the government launched a massive crackdown, arresting and imprisoning several of its leaders, including Secretary-General Nureddin Zaza and other key leaders of the group. The discovery of oil fields in Jazira, and the relationship between the Barzani revolt in Iraq (1961) and the KPDS leadership were the underlying reasons for the

[277] Abdelbaset Seida, *La question Kurde en Syrie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), pp. 43-75. http://www.kovarabir .com/mesal-temo-hebuna-gele-kurd-li-surye.
[278] Gambil, Gary C., *The Kurdish Reawakening in Syria*, 2006, http://www.yasa-online.org/reports/The_Kurdish _reawakening%20_in_Syria.pdf.
[279] Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, pp. 48-49.

harsh suppression.[280] In June 1963, Syria took part in the Iraqi military campaign against the Iraqi Kurds, providing aircraft, armoured vehicles and a force of 6,000 soldiers.[281]

The declaration of Syria as an "Arab Republic" in the interim constitution that followed the termination of the UAR in 1961 was not only a symbolic rhetorical act, but heralded the coming violent Arabization policy in Jazira whose tremendous and long-lasting effects continue up until today.

The harshest measure imposed on Jaziran Kurds came with the special census in November 1962, held in Jazira (or the al-Hasaka governorate), where 67% of Syrian Kurds used to live.[282] On August 23, 1962, Decree No. 93 was issued by the Syrian president Nazim al-Qudsi, which ordered that a census be conducted of all persons residing in the al-Hasaka governorate. According to the Syrian government, the purpose of the census was to identify the Kurds who in 1945 began to

> infiltrate [*yatasallaluna*] into Hasakeh governorate. They came singly and in groups from neighbouring countries, especially Turkey, crossing illegally along the border from Ras al-'Ain to al-Malikiyya. Gradually and illegally, they settled down in the region along the border in major population centres such as Dirbasiyya, Amoudeh, Qamishli, Qahtaniyya, and Malikiyya, until they began to constitute the majority in some of these centres, as in Amoudeh and Malikiyya. Many of these Kurds were able to register themselves illegally in the Syrian civil registers. They were also able to obtain Syrian identity cards through a variety of means, with the help of their relatives and members of their tribes. They did so with the intent of settling down and acquiring property, especially after the issue of the agricultural reform law, so as to benefit from land redistribution. In view of the increase in illegal immigration in this governorate and the resulting increase in the percentage of registrations that had been illicitly inserted [*madsuusa*] into the civil registers, it was decided to conduct a general census in the governorate. The purpose of the census was to purge [*tanqiyya*] the governorate's registers and to effect a reliable and precise reorganization of these registers so that they would contain only the registrations of those whose Syrian citizenship could be established, and eliminate the alien infiltrators [*al-mutasalliliin al-'aghraab*]. Ordinance 93, dated August 23, 1962 … was issued. In accordance with this ordinance, a census of all persons actually present in the governorate was conducted on October 5, 1962. As a result of the investigation of the [completed census] forms of those who were present for the census, the registration of those who had established that they were citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic were made in the new civil registers for Syrians. The others were registered as foreigners in special registers for this purpose.[283]

After the census, the Syrian authorities stripped some 100,000-120,000 of the Jaziran Kurds of their citizenship, claiming that the pre-1920 Ottoman documents contained no

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[280] Ibid.

[281] I. C. Vanly, "The Kurds in Syria and Lebanon," in P. G. Kreyenbroek and S. Sperl (eds.), *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 45.

[282] I. C. Vanly, "The Kurds in Syria and Lebanon", p. 45. Salah Badriddin, *Al-Qadiyya al-Kurdiyya Amam al-Tahaddiyat* [The Kurdish cause in front of challenges] (n.p, n.d.), for the English translation, see: http://www .hevgirtin.net/html/kutub/KNMS.pdf.

[283] Syrian state's response to the Executive Director of Human Rights Watch/Middle East letter, dated June 10, 1996. "Syria, The Silenced Kurds," October 1996, *Human Rights Watch* 8, no. 4(E). See http://www.hrw.org/ legacy/reports/1996/Syria.htm.

record of their families. In fact, the inhabitants had had Syrian identity cards and were told to hand them over to the administration for renewal. However, those Kurds who submitted their cards received nothing in return. These Kurds are classified as "non-citizen foreigners" (*ajanib*) on their identity cards and cannot vote, own property, or obtain government jobs; they are not, however, exempt from the obligatory military service. In addition, some 75,000 Kurds are not officially acknowledged at all and have no identity cards. Another category, "the unregistered" (*maktoum al-qayd*), cannot receive treatment in state hospitals or obtain marriage certificates. Simultaneously, a media campaign was launched against the Kurds with slogans such as "Save Arabism in Jazira" and "Fight the Kurdish threat."[284]

The special census was carried out in an arbitrary manner. Human Rights Watch (HRW) claims that some Kurds in the same family became citizens while others became foreigners. Bribery was a common practice to keep or get back citizenship.[285] Some Armenians and Syriacs also fell victim to the same census; however their citizenship rights were returned after an appeal to the authorities (although in some cases, where the denaturalized person was a male, people would prefer not to inform the authorities, as a means to avoid military service).[286] Currently, the denaturalization issue only concerns the Kurds and in the absence of reliable figures, the number of denaturalized Kurds living in Syria is currently estimated to exceed 300,000.[287]

The Ba'th attitude towards the Kurds was a continuation of the Arabization policies. In the early 1970s, the government began replacing Kurdish place names with Arabic names (Kobani: 'Ain al-Arab, Tirpespi: al-qubur al-bid, Derikê: Malikiyya). Although the Kurds argue that the land reform programmes in the 1960s were designed to weaken the economic power of the Kurdish landowning elite, these reforms were rather directed towards the elites of all groups including the Christians. The Jaziran Christian peasants greatly benefited from the land distribution, and this is also one of the most significant reasons underlying the pro-regime stance of Christians from rural backgrounds.[288] However, the economic prospects of the land reform were immediately undermined for the Kurds due to the Arab belt project (*al-hizam al-'arabi*) along the Turkish border in 1963. The architect of the Arab belt project was

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[284] Ibid.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Private conversation by the author, May 2007, Qamishli, Syria.
[287] Peter Fragiskatos, "The stateless Kurds in Syria: problems and prospects for the ajanib and maktumin Kurds", *International Journal of Kurdish Studies*, 2007, pp. 109-22.
[288] All over Syria, the takeover by lower middle class and poorer rural minoritarian Ba'thists in 1963 led to a social revolution: rural minorities which had earlier been discriminated against and had traditionally belonged to the more backward segments of the Syrian society went through a process of national emancipation. This situation is did not bear on the elites of Jazira, but was valid for the Christian peasants.

a lieutenant of the Syrian Secret Police in Jazira, Muhammad Talib Hilal.[289]The band, 375 km long and 10-15 km wide, stretched from Derikê at the most eastern end of the border, to Ras Al-'Ain in the west.[290] It is along this corridor that the Kurdish land was planned to be expropriated as part of a national agrarian reform plan.

The project started in 1973, but the name "Arab belt" was substituted with "Plan to establish model state farms in the Jazira province."[291] The project aimed to depopulate the region within this band, drive off the Kurds and to settle Arab settlers (*ghamir*) in new "model farming villages." In 1975 the government resettled an estimated 4,000 Arab families, whose own lands had been submerged by the construction of the Tabqa dam on the Euphrates River.[292] From 1973 to 1975 forty-one villages were created in this strip, beginning 10 km west of Ras al-'Ayn. The state treated the new Arab settlers favourably, providing them with superior conditions, and "building homes for free, distributing weapons, seeds and fertilizer, and creating agricultural banks that provided loans."[293] Hafez al-Assad officially ended the Arab settlement project in 1976, but allowed Arab settlers to remain on confiscated land, and neither dismissed the model state farms nor let the displaced Kurds return to their villages. Resentment between the lately-settled Arab villagers and Kurds was inescapable, as the Kurdish villages remained the most underdeveloped in comparison with their neighbours and the rest of Syria.

Here lies the material basis of Kurdish–Syriac rivalry in the Syrian Jazira. While the Kurds have been devoid of even their claims to land after the Arabization policies, Syriacs have been acknowledged by the state as the "autochthones" of Jazira. Hafiz al-Asad's words in his meeting with the members of the Syriac Orthodox group perfectly demonstrate the state's approval for the limits of sectarianism:

> Suriyya baladukum aynama kuntum wa haza haqququm. Wa 'indama aqulu zalika la u'tikum ma laysa lakum

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[289] Hilal, Mohammad Talib, *Dirasa 'an Muhafathat al-Jazira: Min al-Nawahi al-Qawmiyya wa al-Ijtima'iyya wa al-Siyasiyya* [A Study on the Jazeera Governorate: On the ethnic, social and political aspects] (Al-Hasaka, 1963).
[290] For the creation of the Arab Belt policy, see Ismet Şerif Vanly, *The Kurdish Problem in Syria* (Chicago: Committee for the Defence of the Kurdish People's Rights, 1968), pp. 27-99, Human Rights Watch/MENA, *Syria Unmasked: The Suppression of Human Rights by the Asad Regime* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 186; Jordi Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, pp. 61-63; Harriet Montgomery, *The Kurds of Syria: An Existence Denied* (Europäisches Zentrum für Kurdische Studien, Berlin, 2005), pp. 12-13.
[291] HRW, *Group Denial, Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria*, November 2007, http://www.hrw.org/en/node/86735/section/4.
[292] Ibid.
[293] Human Rights Watch, *Syria: The Silenced Kurds*, 1 October 1996, E804, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6a8260.html [accessed 31 December 2010].

> [Syria is your home country wherever you are and that is your right. And when I say that I am not giving you what is not yours].[294]

The Aramaist and Assyrianist arguments can be thought as nationalist ideologies which appropriate the official Syrian line in a sectarian way. The reference to the Aramaic roots of today's Syriacs is in perfect accordance with the Arab nationalist thesis in the Ba'th historiography about Jazira.[295] Secondly, despite the religious and ethnic overtones in the Aramaist and Assyrianist arguments respectively, reclaiming the region as such contest the Kurdish historical and political claims in the Syrian Jazira. In this manner, they indirectly legitimize the Syrian state's denialist/racist arguments about the Jaziran Kurds, which underlie the latter's enfranchisement and maltreatment in Syria.

Despite this oppression, the Syrian Kurds did not organize an effective resistance or a popular Kurdish movement comparable to that of Turkey and Iraq. There are thirteen political parties, all of them illegal; yet the movement also has little legitimacy in the eyes of the Jaziran Kurds. This is for several reasons which are beyond the scope of this thesis. The official expulsion of the PKK from Syrian territory in 1998 and the establishment of a regional Kurdish government in northern Iraq after the US occupation in 2003 provided the Kurds with encouragement to be more visible in the Syrian and Jaziran public. They became increasingly empowered to reject the state's and the Syriac establishment's allegations that "they are alien infiltrators to the Jaziran land," and their nationalist agenda has come to be pronounced more openly in the last decade.

In 2004 there was a local Kurdish uprising in Qamishli, which was brutally suppressed by the state. The Qamishli uprising resulting in at least forty deaths, hundreds injured and more than 2,000 people jailed, marked a new beginning in relations between the Kurds and the state.[296] The murder of Sheikh Ma'shuq Khaznawi, a respected Kurdish religious leader, after his disappearance in May 2005, flared up unrest. His recent statements about the Kurdish poor strengthened suspicions about the state's role in his killing. His funeral became another opportunity for thousands of Kurds to take to the streets of Qamishli and other Jaziran towns, resulting in at least sixty arrests.

Kurdish self-expression and resistance led the Syrian state take some action concerning the issue of citizenship. In April 2004, Defence Minister Mustafa Tlas met some Kurdish leaders and agreed that citizenship would be granted to 30,000 stateless Kurds; however,

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[294] Hafiz al-Assad, in his meeting with the members of the holy group of Syriac Orthodox, April 17, 1997.
[295] Stéphane Valter, *La Construction Nationale Syrienn*, pp. 180-87.
[296] Harriet Montgomery, *The Kurds of Syria*, p. 80.

nothing subsequently happened. The Information Minister, Mehdi Dakhlallah, announced in the summer of 2005 that the government was considering awarding nationality to 120,000 Kurds, which is only half of the number of Kurds without citizenship.[297] No progress has occurred since then.

The following pages will illustrate how the past is reconstructed in (post) memories against the above-mentioned regime changes and the accompanying transformation in the politics of difference and socioeconomic changes. In particular it will display the formative role of the French colonial period in determining self-understandings and modes of identification among the Jazirans in particular.

[297] Robert Lowe, *The Syrian Kurds*: *A People Discovered* (Chatham House, Middle East Programme, BP 06/01 January 2006), http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/3297_bpsyriankurds.pdf.

Chapter II Memories of the Ferman: Religion, History, Politics

> When we lose certain people, or when we are dispossessed from a place, or a community, we may simply feel that we are undergoing something temporary, that mourning will be over and some restoration of prior order will be achieved. But, instead, when we undergo what we do undergo, is something about who we are revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us? It is not as if an "i" exists independently over here and then simply loses a "you" over there, especially if the attachment to "you" is part of what composes who "i" am. If i lose you, under these conditions, then i not only mourn the loss, but i become inscrutable to myself. Who "am" i, without you? When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level, i think i have lost "you" only to discover that "i" have gone missing as well. At another level, perhaps what i have lost "in" you, that for which i have no ready vocabulary, is a relationality that is neither merely myself nor you, but the tie by which those terms are differentiated and related.[298]

This chapter is about the (post) memories of 1915 and the ways in which they impinge upon the Syriac, Armenian, and Kurdish communal subjectivities in today's Syrian Jazira. 1915 underlies the deracination, uprooting, and deportations of the majority of the Ottoman-Armenians to Ottoman-Syria. Today's Armenian Jazirans are those who survived the 1915 violence and were not deported in caravans, but found refugee in the French Jazira after the second wave of violence that the region witnessed, namely the Kurdish Sheikh Said Revolt (1925). However, among these Jazirans, 1915 is still depicted as the decisive event in their (post)memories and as something that changed every aspect of their lives, particularly the lives of Christians. As mentioned in the Introduction, the exodus of the majority of the Syrian Jazirans commenced in the late 1920s and continued up until the 1950s; however, the *ferman* still indicates a violent ending, and also a new beginning and a new period of struggle in the Christians' (post) memories. It stands out as a threshold for the survivors and the later generations, even if few of them directly experienced it. The following pages present an account of their (post) memories about this threshold as I heard it from direct witnesses, or from their children, grandsons, and granddaughters.

The post (memories) of 1915 usually move beyond the personal and contextualize their personal recollections in a larger human context. The narrative accounts move from the individual experience to the communal. Shirinian states that placing one's life in a broader

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[298] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 22.

historical and social context is a defining feature of survivor memoirs.[299] The survivors' testimonies, by bearing witness, make the past intelligible and meaningful for those in the present: The passing-on of Armenian culture is the key to survival for many writers. The memoirs are written to combat loss of identity, community and home. Despite the fact that they are the products of the individual imagination, they have a claim to truth. Memory in the survivor memoirs becomes a factor of social cohesion in the written memoir, for it is through other people's memories that the individual completes her own experience which, in the end, attaches her to the community to which she belongs.

Regardless of their religion and ethnicity, Jazirans usually employ the term *ferman* when they refer to the 1915 Armenian genocide and the following massacres during World War I. Despite the fact that the word *ferman* literally means "state edict," in local usage it refers to the state order for the 1915 Armenian genocide. Similarly, the violent military oppression of the Sheikh Said Revolt (1925) by the Turkish state is also referred as a *ferman* by the Jaziran locals. However, it is distinguished as the *second ferman*—this time on the Kurds, after the (first) *ferman* on the Armenians.

For today's Jazirans, violence, famine, loss, and exile during the war years are shared by all parties, be they perpetrators or victims, though at different levels and to different extents. This holds true for both Kurds and Armenians, for Sunni Arabs, the Syriac Christians or members of other Christian sects, and the Jews and the Assyrians who abandoned their homes and took shelter in the French Jazira. Thousands of refugees, originally from Mardin, Diyarbekir and Siirt provinces, carried with them tales of violence, slaughter, kidnapping, as well as tales of protection and altruism in the French Jazira. The 1915 violence pitted neighbour against neighbour, forcing a sense of communal segregation on a society where coexistence and everyday contact were the norm in pre-*ferman* days. In Syrian Jazira today, almost every family has a story of *ferman* and deportation (*sawqiyat*) to tell. The stories live on inside families, where they are told and retold; they have a life inside communities, where they are enacted continuously in remembrance rituals.

The impact of World War I and its violence at the individual and collective level, and how they are implicated both in the victims' and perpetrators' national and communal identities in post-Ottoman states, are relatively under-studied themes both by Western and Syrian/Lebanese scholars. In the coming sections, my interest will also be less on the direct impact of war and violence on the survivors, and more on how they remember the violence—

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[299] [299] Lorne Shirinian, "Survivor Memoirs", p. 170.

particularly of the (first) *ferman*. What remembering the *ferman* implies for the communities, for inter-communal relationships, for community–state relationships, and for the role of the politics of difference in the present Syrian regime regarding the modes of remembering the *ferman* are some of the other questions that this chapter intends to interrogate.

The 1915 *ferman* is highlighted in the historical narratives of all the Syrian Jazirans regardless of their ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic background; yet its (post)memories vary among individuals and ethno-religious groups. Several individual and structural factors underlie the difference in the memories. First of all, the state-sponsored massacres and persecutions were not executed uniformly throughout the region among different ethno-religious groups; thus the first-hand experience varies. This is mainly due to the official CUP policy, that it was the Ottoman-Armenians as a distinct group first and foremost who were to be targeted and exposed to the genocidal violence. As will be demonstrated below, Christians from other sects were also subject to annihilations and uprooting, but they were not targeted as a group like the Armenians were. Class, locality, the social structure of the locality, its demographic composition, social and political relations with the local authority, the immediate aftermath of the violence, and several other regional, local, and individual factors played significant roles in the way the violence was experienced. Contingency, too, had a role.

Still, after having discussed the shortcomings of the memory studies and the scholarly works on the minorities in the Middle East, the (post)memories of the 1915 *ferman* that will be discussed in length in this chapter might seem to fall into the same culturalist trap, by highlighting the agency, voice, subjectivity, and multiply-situated experiences of the people. Similar to the disregard of the power perspective in studies where "the objectifying structures of military, political and economic power and related forms of alienation and oppression are tended to be omitted, underplayed or placed on one side,"[300] my analyses of the *ferman* memories may seem to underrate the objective categories and the political economy. The multiplicity of the experiences of the people and their "positionality" might give an impression that the subaltern consciousness is "different" and incommensurable. In other words, my narrative of the (post)memories of 1915 might seem to lack a causal model.[301] Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook argue, in their critical review of the Subaltern

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[300]John Chalcraft, *The Invisible Cage, Syrian Migrant Workers in Lebanon* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 8.

[301] For new discussions among Marxists aimed at overcoming over-determination and reinstituting agency, see Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff, *New Departures in Marxian Theory* (NY: Routledge 2007).

Studies Collective that was mentioned before, that "it is only in the light of some conception of a dominant cultural logic or hegemonic system that resistance, emancipation or difference can be meaningfully identified or measured at all."[302] Following their claim, I affirm, once again, that the authoritarian populist rule in Syria as well as the Syriac/Assyrian, Armenian or Kurdish nationalist discourses or their Syrian appropriations in the form of Syrian Syriac/Syrian Armenian official sectarian discourses inform the ways in which Jazirans remember the past. It is through the same hegemonic system that the remembrances gain a socio-political and cultural meaning. The political implications of the still-unresolved debates about religion, ethnicity and state which date from the French mandate rule continue to haunt the Jaziran subjectivity and the (post)memories as well. They emerge over and over again in novel forms in the memories within the social, political, and economic context in present-day Syria.

Thus, the memories are construed in different ways and through different discourses. This claim is even more relevant for the (post)memories of the children and grandchildren of the survivors, who are in fact far more outspoken than their survivor parents. There are different versions of the same historical incident as retrieved by different members of the same or different groups at different times. As well as this, particular versions of an event are promoted, reformulated, or silenced for different audiences under different power settings. This confirms once again that memory-work must be understood both in the context of the social actors involved in its production and the social conditions of its production.

Nevertheless, undermining the multi-layered meanings and misery intrinsic to the (post)memories and treating them solely as strategic cards in a domestic or international political game is also falling into political reductionism. The colonial, post-colonial, and nationalist/communalist discourses never regiment the memories in an absolute way. Thus, the causal model acknowledging the power relations intrinsic to the rememberings should always leave room for the individual actor. In other words, despite the fact that personal experiences and their retrieval are important sources in a little-documented historical event whose victims are not acknowledged by the Turkish state, the memories should not be approached solely as instruments that feed into certain political arguments.

It has been ninety-five years since the catastrophe took place, and the Jaziran Armenians, Syriacs and Kurds have been living in Syria for nearly seventy years. In the meantime, several

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[302] Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook, "After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism and Politics in the Third World," in Vinayak Chatervedi (ed.), *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* (New York: Verso, 2000), p. 199.

political, social, and economic changes have occurred on the national and international scene. Both the Turkish and the Syrian state, imperial Western states (for the purpose of this thesis, France is most important), as well as various groups (Armenian, Kurdish, and Syriac) have constructed and solidified their official narratives describing, explaining, and analyzing the 1915 genocide and its aftermath. Compared to the Syriacs and the Kurds, the Armenians enjoy the most articulate, coherent and widely dispersed narrative on 1915. Despite the fact that memories of Jazirans on 1915 and afterwards are processed by incorporative memory-work governed by a series of nationalist and communalist ideologies aspiring for hegemony, the memories are not given their entire shape by mainstream colonial, nationalist, or communalist discourses (neither Turkish, Arab, Syriac, Armenian, nor Kurdish). For instance, some of my interviewees, especially those who experienced the massacres firsthand or were born immediately after, lack explanations for their dispossession; thus they are unable to account for or rationalize the violence that resulted in millions being wiped from their homelands. For them, the events of 1915 correspond to the "unthinkable." A way of life had been destroyed, every-day norms and rules of morality turned upside-down. As one of my interviewees said: "If ever the Armenians were not killed in the massacres, they would have died out of dread or gone insane as they just could not stand remembering those horrendous scenes of violence for more than a couple of months."

The post-1915 world was an unfamiliar one. Though the wave of bloodshed was over, the memories of horror and agony did not vanish; they often disrupted the normal course of the after-life. The unexpected and sudden explosion of the memories of the "sudden and unexpected violence" becomes more obvious among the first-hand witnesses of the events, who indeed preferred to *dis-remember* the bitter period, by withholding from talking publicly about the atrocities. However, the memories erupted nonetheless: while seeing a slaughtered sheep during the Muslim feast of sacrifice in Qamishli in the 1940s; or coming across a person, furniture, smell, or piece of music that recalled the pre-*ferman* days.[303] No matter how much the violence was rationalized and striven to be conceived in terms of a religious/ethnic war between the Muslims (Turks/Kurds) and the Christians (Armenians/Christians)—or as a Turkish assault on the Armenians, a Turkification project, or a Zionist-imperialist intrigue—the sensory memory of the enormous violence would make first-hand witnesses collapse,

[303] For the working of sensory memory and the ways it undermines the integrity and coherence of the narratives/histories, see Allan Young, "Bodily Memory and Traumatic memory," in Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (eds.) *Tense Past*: *Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Ruth Leys, "Traumatic Cures: Shell Shock, Janet and the Question of Memory," in Lantze and Lambek, *Tense Past*, pp. 103-145.

burst into tears and their self-integrity break down.[304] Here appears a peculiar characteristic of memory as against history as a register of truth, which becomes more evident in the oral accounts, especially of the survivor women, and in particular of the Armenians, who were relatively less exposed to the disciplinary mechanisms of their respective states or the community. The history and the official memoires are endowed with a rational, analytic, and closed narrative, in which the violence remain within the structured text usually as a residue; however, the oral accounts are more flexible and less rational. Similar to what Pandey demonstrates for the memories of of partition, the violence is not given a rational meaning in these narratives; it stands as something which exceeds the limits of reason.[305] Regardless of the underlying reasons, for them it is *the violence*—the death of millions, the dispersal of old communities, loss of loved ones, loss of homes—that defines the incidents. Sensorial remembering of the horror scenes evoked fear, but not necessarily an utter despair. The Christian refugees of the French Jazira have retained, even into old age, a lively hope of returning home. They tended to consider their new lives in the French Jazira as an in-between or temporary stage. They longed for home and remembered it with idyllic nostalgia. Yet they were never able to return.

Similarly, the deconstructive interpretation embraced throughout the chapter should not be taken to mean that the way people feel or their memories are "unreal" or mere "community-conceits"; nor that the actions they take are intended to serve to certain political ends and that I, as the writer, can reveal the truth behind their actions. For instance, the words, the meanings attached to them, and the feelings of Hasan Yousif Murad, a lower class, very elderly Kurdish men from Qamishli, are as real as his life is. Hasan—or Melek, his Armenian name before he was Kurdified/Islamicized at the age of four, after being sold to the Kurds by his aunt who was in a state of extreme deprivation—became the follower of a Kurdish Sufi Sheikh, but has always known that he used to be Armenian; he supported the "Armenian cause" in the sense that he approved whenever he heard about it on the TV, and made his daughter marry one of the sons of his lost brothers, who are *still* Armenian, when by coincidence he met them, thirty years ago. The aim of this chapter is thus not to minimize their reality, but to show the politics behind the act of remembering and interrogate the categories structuring the actions and adaptive strategies of the social actors.

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[304] For an Arab nationalist interpretation of the Armenian genocide, see Mousa, Khalil and Naim al-Yafi, *Nidal al-'Arab wa al-Arman did al-Isti'mar al-'Uthmani* [The Struggle of the Arabs and Armenians against Ottoman Colonialism] (Halab: Dar al-Hiwar, 1995).
[305] Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, Introduction.

I will pay special attention to the diverse and at times contesting narratives of Jaziran Armenians, Kurds, and Syriacs on the massacres and the following displacements. In this manner, I will be able to demonstrate the disciplining of local memories in relation to the terms of the unacknowledged authoritarian-sectarian rule in Syria, and in relation to the mainstream nationalist/communalist accounts of each group under scrutiny. The (post)memories analyzed in this chapter do not claim to stand for "distorted memories" in relation to the objective "History," as briefly outlined in Chapter 1. On the contrary, I aim to make the memories speak to history and so to attempt to demonstrate the politics of history-making in the reconstruction of a Syriac, Armenian, and Kurdish collective self.[306] I will refer to the *impure* and *shared* history of the Jaziran Christians and Kurds prior to their exodus to Syria, which I mentioned in Chapter 1, in order to demystify the sectarian/nationalist discourses intrinsic to the Jazirans' memories about 1915 and before, which continuously produce *difference*.

The basic material that I utilize in this chapter consists of in-depth interviews carried out with Armenians, Syriacs, and Kurds, as well as some Syrian Sunni Muslims from different sections of society in different cities of Syrian Jazira and Aleppo. Vahram Shemmassian, in his detailed studies on the Armenian captives after the genocide, argues that women and children constituted a special category of victims of the genocide as they suffered physically, emotionally, and psychologically following the murder of the males of the Armenian society.[307] Starving and fever-stricken Armenians died along the railway during their deportation to the camps. Typhus was the most common disease of the day. Family life in the camps disintegrated; husbands, wives, and children were separated and immorality flourished.[308] "Those who did not succumb to starvation, disease, exposure, drowning or outright massacre were abandoned, abducted, raped or sold in the slave markets. They became part of Muslim society in Turkey, greater Syria and Mesopotamia, serving as concubines, wives, servants or slaves."[309] Most of my interviewees belong to this abandoned category who continued to live in a world turned upside-down, where the rules of morality had collapsed, the concept of justice was damaged, homes and villages ruined, and family members and

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[306] For the relation between archive, memory and truth, see Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History (Encounters)* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).
[307] Vahram L. Shemmassian, "The League of Nations and the Reclamation of Armenian Genocide Survivors," in Richard G. Hovannisian, *Looking Backward, Moving Forward: Confronting the Armenian Genocide* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), p. 81.
[308] PLO, FO 371/2783/24258, Secret, Addendum to "Report of an Inhabitant of Athlit, Mount Carmel Syria, Nov. 27, 1916. Taken from http://www.armenian-genocide.org/br-11-27-16-text.html.
[309] Shemmassian, "League of Nations", p. 81.

loved ones lost. They became domestic servant/slaves in Kurdish households, especially in the period between the *ferman* on the Armenians (1915) and the *ferman* on the Kurds (1925), until their arrival in the French Jazira. Killed or sold or taken away, they were dispersed all over the region among the Arab and Kurdish tribes. Some were Islamicized in the process, and some were Islamicized forever. There is hardly anyone among the Kurds and Arabs of the Syrian Jazira who does not have a Kurdified or Arabized Armenian as one of their grandmothers—or, more rarely, as a grandfather. The profile of my interviewees accords with this historical reality. Six of my interviewees were young children at the time of the genocide. Two of them are Kurds in their late 90s, yet remember that they were Armenians before they were sold or adopted by Kurdish families. Two other women and another Armenian man arrived in the French Jazira as Armenians. Being the survivors of the 1915 Armenian genocide in the Mardin Sanjak and east of Diyarbakır, they escaped from the killings, atrocities, and everyday intimidations by Turkish state officials, the army, and the local population, as well as from economic hardships, and sought a more secure and safe life in the French Jazira. The age profile of my Syriac and Kurdish interviewees is similar. Two of my Kurdish interviewees were young children during the Sheikh Said Revolt (1925), while three of my Syriac interviewees were first-hand eyewitnesses to the significant events during the Syriac massacres (*seyfo*). The rest of my interviewees are either first-hand hearers, or second and third generation descendants of eye-witnesses.

Remembering the *Ferman*: Main Lines of Inquiry

Remembering the massacres for Armenians, states Lorne Shirinian

> is to affirm presence and affirm that even after the catastrophe, Armenians have survived and have learnt to adapt their culture in a new world … as the Genocide is the attempt, not only to eradicate a people from the face of the earth, but also to destroy any record of their existence so that it appears that their culture was never a motif in the human tapestry.[310]

This statement accords with the Jaziran Armenians' way of memorializing the *ferman*. A similar argument may be made for what the massacres mean to the Syriacs and what the

[310] Lorne Shirinian, "Survivor Memoirs", p. 171.

enduring state violence means to the Kurds. The (post)memories evoke sadness, but also a great strength in the personal and social affirmation of the survivors.

For the Jaziran Armenians, the war is nothing but *the* ferman, and it denotes an unadulterated catastrophe and collapse in the form of massacres, loss, suffering, and exodus. Its violence and brutality became a central and the most fundamental theme of history. Every single person I met remembered some scene, a story or a location to do with the *ferman*. It was etched in people's consciousness and marked the historical time. The *ferman* ends; but unlike the formal date for the termination of the war (1918), for them the war does not come to an end, but extends all through the early 1920s until the Sheikh Said Revolt, i.e. the *ferman* on the Kurds. The description given by Rihan, an elderly Syriac-convert Kurdophone woman originally from "Bişeriyye" (Bişêrî is currently referred to as Bisheriyye by the Jazirans) who used to be Armenian before the *ferman*, is suggestive of the way it is remembered in the popular memory, especially among the older generation.

> These Kurds and we were indeed brothers. Then the Turks distributed arms to the Kurds and said "go and slaughter these Armenians and we'll give you their lands in return." Kurds took arms and got married with the Armenian girls and adopted those who are functional for the well-being of the *agha*. Then, the Kurds asked for their rightful return. But Turks turned out to be malicious and deceitful. They did not give them their return. Turks are unreliable and do not have mercy [*rehmet*] in their hearts.[311]

The mass and organized violence turned the familiar world and common sense into something extraordinary or unthinkable; it made the victims socially deracinated and dispossessed. Indeed, it is the absence of a way of life and associated rules of morality that were once taken for granted that characterizes the individual and collective memories of the Jaziran Armenians. The stories of loss, scattering, and oblivion are the most widely told ones. Loss takes the form of loss of self, loss of roots, or loss of family. I was told an enormous number of stories about a certain *Manouk* becoming *Sofu 'Ali* or becoming *Mihemed*, being raised as a Muslim, sometimes as the son of the chief of an Arab tribe, going to his native town in Turkey with his new identity; or, by sheer coincidence, meeting his brothers who had retained their Armenianness until that time, in one of the big cities of Lebanon or Syria. The quotations below, from an elderly Armenian man and a middle-aged Armenian teacher in a

[311] Rihan, March 2006, interview with the author, Qamishli, Syria.

Protestant school respectively, might be illustrative of the ways in which the "loss" is articulated in the memories.

> We became scattered, collapsed. There is no one in Syria who doesn't have an Armenian grandmother, especially in Jazira. Our daughters and our women got married with Arabs and the Kurds perforce. They became Muslim. But … .
>
> We know everything and we know nothing. We are present everywhere all over the world but we are nowhere. I know Kurdish, Armenian, Arabic, English, and Aramaic but I know none of them very well.[312]

A whole life that is left behind in an absolute fashion, and that will never be returned, is remembered in extreme grief. The old life and old way of living are remembered through its fields, trees, rivers, insects, but also through the material belongings and relations that are left behind back at home and for which the new refuge is never really a substitute. A series of quotations below by elderly Armenians from different backgrounds and localities demonstrate different ways of conveying the losses.

> In Sason we had land, but in the new village we became sharecroppers in the land of the agha.[313]
>
> During the first ferman the people thought that if they hold on to their guns and resist it, the soldiers would kill more, so they didn't resist it. But it didn't help, on the contrary, all of us were killed except those people who had functional abilities for the maintenance of everyday life … And after the second ferman, we became totally dispossessed and my father became a shepherd. He used to be the owner of a village, but after the ferman he became the shepherd of Mirzu Ali Kilo.[314]

Oturmazdım ipekli halıya
Şimdi düştüm boklu çalıya.[315]

[I wasn't sitting on a silken rug
Now I'm degraded to a shitty shrub]

> We are not kicked out only of our homes but also of our homeland [*watan*] from Cilicia. It is the third generation now and we still speak Turkish among us.[316]

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[312] Ustad Koko, March 2007, interview with the author, Qamishli, Syria
[313] Seyran Pedro, March 2007, interview with the author, Qamishli, Syria.
[314] Qas, March 2007, interview with the author, Qamishli, Syria.
[315] Anahit, dar al-'ajaza, May 2006, interview with the author, Aleppo, Syria.
[316] Mudir, dar al-'ajaza, May 2006, interview with the author, Aleppo, Syria.

The historical record proves their misery and the loss of their material wealth. By the autumn of 1915, the Ottoman bureaucracy had depopulated most of the Armenian settlements and isolated or eliminated the community leaders. In the meantime, the vast economy of the Armenians—farms, lands, businesses, factories, workplaces, ateliers, and in some cities entire sections of bazaars—were confiscated. The Turkification of that economy was decreed with the enactment of several regulations of 1915, through which all remaining businesses were transferred to Muslim owners and the proceeds taken by the state.[317]

Almost always, nostalgia accompanies the memories of tragedy. As Seed states, nostalgia "springs from capitulation, resigning oneself to the irretrievable loss of familiar objects and well-liked faces, the bonds of friendship, shared learning and languages."[318] It is the loss, as well as the non-acknowledgment of the loss and violence by the Turkish state, that paves the way for nostalgic memories. Obviously, these are not peculiar to the Armenians: Jaziran Syriacs too remember the by-gone past in a nostalgic way, as exemplified by the below, near-generic, quotation:

> Everything is nice about the home, its water, its land, and its trees. That's why our elders used to live longer because they grew up with the water of the homeland [*watan*].

To the Syriac (post)memory, the massacres, loss, and displacement of the *ferman* stand at the centre of their narratives, though lacking the character of a historical moment of rupture in the manner that 1915 is for the Armenians. The Syriacs' (post)memory refers to a more diluted, yet prolonged feeling of suffering. For the Syriac community in Jazira, then, *ferman* does not only refer to the 1915 or World War I mobilizations; it is inflated to cover the whole period until the late 1920s and their arrival in the French Jazira, before which they had still been suffering from the anti-Christian practices of the new Turkish state. The arrival in Syria and the period of French rule are singled out as the end of suffering and adversities, as will be demonstrated in more detail in the coming chapter.

The elderly Jaziran Kurds, whose memories of displacement from Turkey to Jazira are less worked through by mainstream Kurdish political discourses, do remember the 1915 slaughter. However, the 1915 massacres themselves are rather elusive memories, and are intertwined in the general narrative of poverty during World War I. It is the 1925 Sheikh Said

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[317] Uğur Üngör, "Seeing like a nation-state: Young Turk social engineering in Eastern Turkey, 1913–50", *Journal of Genocide Research* 10, no. 1 (2008), p. 25.
[318] Patricia Seed, "The Key to the House," in Hamid Naficy (ed.), *Home, Exile, Homeland, Film, Media and the Politics of Place* (London: Routledge 1999), p. 91.

Revolt and the ensuing anti-Kurdish politics of the Turkish Republic that form the plot of the Kurds' war narratives. The 1915 massacres are at best incorporated into the 1925 Turkish state terror. The educated middle-class nationalist Kurds, however, strive to unmake the Kurdish agency in the 1915 genocide through externalizing religion in the make-up of Kurdishness and defining the latter solely on ethnic grounds. Accordingly, they transfer the Kurdish complicity in the genocide to different subjects and belongings. They blame Islam and/or the Turkish state. They highlight the Kurdish protection provided to the genocide survivors. They refer to the Xoybun experience, where the Dashnak party and the Kurdish nationalist movement in exile made politics together. The dialogue below demonstrates two different ways in which 1915 is dealt with in the Jaziran Kurdish memory. The dialogue took place between a middle-class Kurd and his elderly father, K, who traces his origins to the Omeri tribe, was born around 1915 in one of the villages of Mardin, and fled to Jazira in 1941 to escape from compulsory military service in Turkey.

> Me: Are there any Christians in the village?
>
> K: No, no, there is none. The whole village population is Kurdish and Muslim.
>
> Me: Did any Christian persecution happen?
>
> K: Yes, the slaughtering happened *during* the ferman. I heard about it, but I did not witness it with my own eyes. I heard that the Christians betrayed, the Germans warned the Turks that if the latter does not throw the Armenians out of their land, then there won't be any milk left on this land. Then, the *ferman* on Armenians was issued and the Turks began slaughtering the Armenians. Then, the Kurds also joined them. The Kurds said "Muslim is Muslim, Christian is Christian, and in other words, onion is either red or black."
>
> His son (intervening): But it wasn't us who killed them, we were fooled, the Kurds did it in the name of Islam, we were chewed up by the Turks, the Turks exploited us for their dirty work.
>
> K: No, no *we* killed them. *We* slaughtered the Armenians like sheep … But, those times were the time of slaughtering; later on that time was over.

Unlike his son who blurs the Kurdish agency using an anti-state discourse, K acknowledges his tribe members' participation in the 1915 massacres and rationalizes it on economic and religious grounds. Yet, unlike his son, he does not justify the Kurdish involvement in the massacres. In his description, he refers solely to the *zeitgeist* of 1915, the spirit of a bygone time. The official harmony discourse—of peaceful religious coexistence with regards to the post-genocide lives—is not at all present in his crude description of the massacres. Unlike the Christians' embrace of a state-sponsored harmony discourse, the Kurds do not refrain from mentioning the discord and dissidence *both* in the past and in their present

lives. What the Kurds consider as the *ferman* on them (1925), after the *ferman* on the Armenians, is singled out as *the* real threshold, and indeed as the starting point of a long history of oppression which endures until today. The turmoil in Turkey, their subsequent flight to the French Jazira, and their present lives in Syrian Jazira are conceived as continuous events belonging to the same discursive world. These two events are remembered as different fragments of one larger whole, and are articulated through an amalgamation of the discourses of victimhood/ oppression and of resistance. Unlike the Syriacs, who emphasize the physical violence and material deprivation of the (first) *ferman* days and overlook the economic and social reasons underlying their exodus to Jazira, the Kurds do not lay emphasis on a singular "Big Event."

The selection, highlighting, and elaboration of these particular historical instances confirm Nora's argument regarding the construction of memory. According to Nora, memories are most fixated upon at turning points where there is a break in the consciousness of the past.[319] They are framed as a response to rupture, lack, and absence, and are a "substitute, surrogate, or consolation for something that is missing."[320]

The sense of *enduring* oppression in the Kurdish memory—and the correlative lack of a turning point—stems from the absence of a salvation phase analogous to that which the French mandate rule and post-colonial Syria granted to the Jaziran Christians, in a material sense as well as politically and ideologically. As mentioned in the Introduction, while the Jaziran Kurds have suffered due to the crude and violent anti-Kurdish discriminatory practices of the Syrian state, the Christians have been bestowed state recognition as religious communities and are granted a certain degree of communal autonomy in today's Syria. The Syrian Syriac and Armenian mainstream communalist/nationalist discourses are accepted by the Syrian state. The Christians' victimhood–resistance dyad is given a space within the Arab nationalist narrative about World War I. The Syrian Arab nationalist narrative incorporates its "Christian sects" into its official history by regarding the ex-Ottoman subjects, *both* Arabs and Christians, as victims of Ottoman tyranny. The Kurds, however, as the objects of Turkish nationalist violence *a*re excluded from the Syrian Arab nationalist narrative about Ottoman rule. Anti-Kurdish discrimination against the Jaziran Kurds in the independence period paves

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[319] Pierre Nora, "Les Lieux de Mémoires", *Representations*, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, 26 (Spring 1989), p. 7.
[320] Nathalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, "Introduction", *Representations*, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, 26 (Spring 1989), p. 3.

the way for a Kurdish narrative of oppression in which the Kurdish involvement in the 1915 genocide is obscured and not confronted in a real sense.

The *ferman* terror took different forms and the experience of it varies in social, class, cultural, geographical, and occupational terms, as is related above; nevertheless, the Jaziran Christians as a whole recall the massacres and the flight from their homeland, foremost as extremely fearful and violent events that devastated the community materially and moreover ruined the sense of "old-community." However, the mere fact of being the victims of the same process of nation-making in Turkey and sharing the same destiny of slaughter and uprooting does not engender similarity in communal subjectivities. Quite evidently, the post-memories of the *ferman* usually evoke anger based on unjust treatment in the past, and they re-call memories of violence and avoidance albeit in subtle ways and always compensated by an all-encompassing and abstract discourse of communal harmony in the present. However, this agony and antagonism is directed towards different actors/groups in the Syrian Armenian and Syrian Syriac mainstream narratives. Ethnographic material in the following pages will describe the differences between the Syriac and Armenian subjectivities in more detail, but, by way of a rough initial statement, the Turks in Turkey appear as the Other in the mainstream Armenian mainstream discourse/memories, while Kurds or Muslims in general are depicted as the Other in the Syriac establishment discourse/ memories. More significantly, a general lack of knowledge about the other and rivalry in the public sphere characterizes the relation between these two Christian communities in Jazira. Especially obvious among the Syriacs, and even more so among their nationalists, is a kind of identity fetishism and will to power. Both pro-Assyrian and pro-Aramaic nationalist groups rival the Armenians in a struggle for public acknowledgement and international recognition of their "genocide" (*seyfo*). It is not uncommon to come across to such articulations of this rivalry, as for example in the words of a middle-class Syriac from an old-elite family:

> We were killed [*qataluna*] because of the Armenians. We were very peaceful and docile people; we were self-sufficient religious people. We were never naughty; we never rebelled against the Ottoman state, never asked for autonomy like the Armenians did. We went down the drain just because of them [Armenians] but of course ignorance and religious fundamentalism [of the Kurds] gave way to our slaughtering as well. And that they—the Armenians—they even don't count us in their 1.5 million deaths.[321]

[321] al-Ciran, May 2006, interview with the author, Qamishli, Syria.

Arguably, what characterizes the everyday contact between different communities in Syrian Jazira may be compared to "avoidance," as Larsen terms the daily interactions between Catholics and Protestants in a small village in Northern Ireland. He argues that where social relations are ambivalent, one can expect to find manifestations of social distance: thus, individuals would seek to avoid an object or a person out of deference or self-protection, as well as reference to the conflict.[322] Social distance summarizes the intercommunal relations in Syrian Jazira. Under the Christian public discourse of harmony and tolerance lie avoidance, unfamiliarity, and rivalry with the other communities. This is what the state-sponsored "inter-communal harmony" discourse implies: unequal state division of the public sphere on the basis of religious communities.[323] As a result, Jazirans obstinately hold on to their respective communities, and in this way reify the secluded position of their "community" and the accepted communalist ideology in rivalry with the other in the highly fragmented Syrian public space. Unfamiliarity and avoidance characterizing the relationship between different ethno-religious groups in Jazira/Syria is played out as rivalry in the (post)memories of the *ferman*.

Remembering the Violence and Reconstructing the Community in the Past: "Religious Sect is the Memory of People." [*Mazhab huwa zikriyat al-bashar*][324]

Several studies have demonstrated that remembering violence—as well as oblivion, considered as its opposite—has a significant role in the construction of a collective self. In their edited volume about the politics of memory and violence in the Middle East and North Africa, Makdisi and Silverstein argue that violence, as both challenge and riposte, solidified, reified, and idealized ethnic, religious, and national communities which were inherently fragmentary and unstable.[325] Pandey, in his work about the memories of the partition of India and Pakistan (1947), convincingly demonstrates that the violence, and memories of violence, although leaving the victims shattered, had on another level a formative role in a nostalgic

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[322] S. Larsen, "The Two Sides of the House: Identity and Social Organization in Kilbroney, Northern Ireland," in A.P. Cohen (ed.), *Belonging, Identity and Social Identity in British Rural Cultures* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), p. 145.
[323] For sectarianism as a political strategy, see Yasin al Haj Salih, "Sinaa' al-tawaif: al-ta'ifiyya bi wasfiha istraticiyya saytara siyasiyya," *al-Adab*, Special Issue on Sectarianism 1, p. 41.
[324] Words of a member of the Syrian communist party, son of an ex-refugee Syriac from Mardin, interview with the author, May 2007, Damascus, Syria.
[325] Ussama Makdisi and Paul A. Silverstein, *Memory and Violence in the Middle East and North Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2006), p. 2.

reconstitution of the community and the pre-partition world.[326] The historical domain of violence becomes, as McDougall puts it, "the basis for the constitution of collective narratives of origin, loss and recovery as well as the precondition for any future reconciliation."[327]

As the quotation of "*mazhab huwa zikriyat al-bashar"* suggests, the (post) memories of violence in Turkey are played out in a similar way in the Syrian Jazira. The religious sect gains a social meaning where the transmission of the (post)memories of violence becomes one of its main consitituents. The formative role of violence becomes more evident in the written memoirs, but also in the oral accounts of the second and third generation Jaziran Christians.

It is clearly the case, however, that "1915 functions as a symbol through which Armenians have knowledge about themselves and see themselves."[328] Remembering the genocide comes to be acknowledged as one of the markers of Armenian identity. In the words of a Tashnak sympathizer from Dirbessiyye, Jazira:

> 1915 flows with the milk of our mothers. It is something essential. It should always be remembered otherwise one loses his Armenianness.[329]

Narratives of violence have to be repeated from time to time in order to continuously restore them to collective memory. These narratives are told in order to heal, blame, unite, and also to forget. By giving a collective meaning to the personal, the memory of violence plays a decisive role in the affirmation and the reproduction of a collective Armenian identity. Yousef, born in 1914 in Siirt, and who Islamicized his name in order remain in Turkey until he deserted from Turkish military service in 1940 and fled to Syria with the help of Kurdish smugglers, conveys that:

> Since my childhood up until now every night before I sleep I repeat and try to recite these stories of *sawqiyat* [deportation] that I heard from the elders in the family. I feel very very sorry if I cannot recall a part of it. I should always keep them alive in my mind.[330]

Razmik Panossian states that the Armenian genocide was the great equalizer of identity. [331]He argues that the millennia-long evolution of collective identity in the historic homeland

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[326] Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, Introduction.
[327] James McDougall, *History and Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[328] Lorne Shirinian, "Survivor memoirs," p. 168.
[329] Suren, April 2006, interview with the author, Dirbesiyye, Syria.
[330] Yousef, March 2006, interview with the author, Qamishli, Syria.

came to an abrupt end with the genocide, and that it transformed the identity of the Armenian survivors. Several factors, all of which emanate essentially from the genocide, defined what it meant to be an Armenian in the twentieth century.[332] Memories of violence at least partly eliminated differences of place, generation, or family, since they explained why people had left (and still want to leave), why they never came back, and why they are who they are in Syria. The memories of violence play an important role in the imagination of a unified and genuine nation. In the words of an 80-year-old Armenian man who lives in the almshouse:

> Armenian is something, Christian is something else. We are Armenians they are Christians. We die[d] together, we live together. Armenia is our homeland, but we used to reside in Diyarbekir.[333]

In respect to the partition of India and Pakistan, Pandey argues that "violence happens—and can only happen—at the boundaries of the community. It marks those boundaries. It is the denial of any violence 'in our midst,' the attribution of harmony *within* and the consignment of violence to the *outside* that establishes the 'community.' Violence and community constitute each other, as it were."[334] In Jazira, too, memories of violence in the Ottoman Empire/Turkey lead to the underrating of class, religious, language, and regional differences within the Armenian community in the history and today and functions as a cement, uniting the community against the violence of the "outsider." Many denominational conflicts within the Armenian and Syriac community are also silenced in the narratives about the war years and the aftermath. As will be explained in more detail in the coming pages, Armenian and Syriac (post)memories of violence represent the Armenians and Syriacs—who are originally from different social, economic, cultural, and geographical backgrounds—as members of a solid and exclusive religious community (*ta'ifa*) in opposition to a hostile and monolithic Muslim community or an abstract Turk. In the post (memories), the contradictions, tensions, and rivalry within the Armenian and Syriac communities are smoothed over and assimilated under the general collectivity of Syriacs and Armenians. This is particularly the case with the urban middle classes who emphasize the coherency of the community more openly. Occasionally, though, I heard stories from some of the lower-class members of the Syriac

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[331] Razmik Panossian, "The Impact of the Genocide on Armenian National Identity," *The Armenian Weekly*, 15, April 2007.
[332] He makes this claim following Gerard Libaridian.
[333] Hagop, hospice (dar al-'ajaza), May 2006, interview with the author, Aleppo, Syria.
[334] Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, p. 188.

community about the corruption and self-interest of the Syriac notables during the *ferman* times. Intra-communal rivalry in Midyat and its repercussions for the Syriac community there formed one of those cases. Gello Shabo, a Syriac notable from Midyat, was one of the figures involved. Shabo was a well-respected personality among the French mandate officers in Jazira and was one of the pioneers of the later autonomist movement. He and some other notables were accused of having collected the aid funds sent by Queen Elizabeth to the Syriac priest in Mosul and squandering the "communal fund" in their self-interest.

Intrinsic to the narratives of violence in Jazira is a shared discourse of victimhood. Being an Armenian or a Syriac, and also a Kurd, means being part of a community of sufferers, though victimhood is worked out differently by different parties in different settings at different times. More so in the memories of the Christians, the *ferman* violence itself and the ensuing exile become a metaphor for victimhood. Panossian emphasizes the centrality of the notion of victimhood in the Armenian national consciousness, since everyone became a victim and being an Armenian came to mean belonging to a community of survivors. This claim holds true for the Jaziran Armenians as well as for the other Jaziran communities, Kurds and Syriacs, who found refugee in the French Jazira. Armbruster, in her work on the Syriac community in Tour 'Abdin, Turkey, and in diaspora in Germany, states that suffering is indeed the sediment of memory and an ethos of the Syriac community.[335] She argues that the Suryoyo's (Syriacs) relationship to the past of Tour 'Abdin as prominently related to the topoi of suffering and history took on the meaning of a succession of hardship and loss.[336] She links the resonance of the discourse of victimhood to the wider history of the region and the present political tension prevailing in Turkey.

However, it would be misleading to view the community's self-depiction solely as a "community of sufferers" and not to bring into the picture the discourse of resistance as an accompanier of the discourse of victimhood. I would argue that it is a particular configuration of these two discourses which is one of the markers of the idea of community in Syrian Jazira, despite the fact that this dyad is unfolded differently by different actors/communities and engenders different subject positions depending on the social, economic, and political setting.

In this sense, Armenians' self-awareness may be compared to survival and endurance in the face of *past* hardships. (This becomes more obvious especially when the discourse of regeneration and "national revival" are taken into account; these will be elaborated in the following chapters.) For the Armenians and to a lesser degree the Syriacs, the resistance

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[335] Heidemarie Armbruster, *Securing the Faith*, p. 50.
[336] Ibid., p. 51.

discourse places emphasis on the purity and heroism of the individuals against the *impossible* odds (which is sometimes represented as Turks, and sometimes as Muslims such as Arabs and Kurds). Self-keeping is usually a gendered thing which is viewed through women's experiences of suffering and resistance: the woman who encountered the danger with firmness and who resisted the suffering is highly praised and seen as keeping the purity of the nation. I have heard so many stories of women who threw themselves into the Euphrates or the Khabur Rivers during their march in the caravans, and who sacrificed themselves after being exposed to rape or sexual violence from the Turkish soldiers or the local Kurdish population, or just in order "not to sleep under a *Muslim* man." There are also stories about legendary women who hid themselves in caves or who killed their own sons or, most of the time, their daughters in order "not to be sold out to a *Muslim* man or not to sell their children to Muslims." The women who committed suicide as a means of resistance have entered the canon of collective memory. The stories of these women are constantly told. The idea that death was preferable to a loss of honour and that besides this it was incumbent on the woman to protect the honour of the "community," its men, and therefore the nation, is revealed in the quotation below:

> In the old days, our elders always used to tell us the very sad stories of the *seferberlik* days. My mother-in-law never stopped telling me how her close relatives were killed in front of her eyes. Have you got an idea why the Arabs turned out to be beautiful? It is because our beauty is transferred to them. They were greedy enough to take the Christian young girls into their possessions … But we resisted, we sacrificed ourselves in order not to get married with a Muslim man; we threw ourselves into the burrows and stayed there for days without any food.[337]

What is significant in these stories is that memories of violence have become the motor through which a collective meaning is assigned to personal experiences. Similar to other contexts of colonial or national warfare, such as Palestine, India–Pakistan, or Guatemala, unofficial secret memories or personal tragedies are reworked and turned into national/communal narratives, so that those memories reposition themselves in the past, constructing a sense of continuity and restoring a semblance of dignity. In the narratives about both resistance and victimhood, it is always the community and collectivity that is addressed. The personal experience is always incorporated into the collective memory and the local is incorporated into the "communal/national," and thus the personal is endowed with a collective meaning. Women with their sacrificial acts become the carriers of the national spirit. The fact that they were adopted or kidnapped by Muslims rarely detracts from their

[337] Seta, interview with the author, May 2007, Aleppo, Syria.

"Armenianness."[338] So the act of flight and self-keeping are assigned a collective meaning and incorporated into the history of the nation, which is depicted as enduring in spite of all adversities.

> Our women always kept their Armenianness and their cross secretly by heart. When the conditions permitted, they escaped.

However, the Syriacs' sense of being may be compared to *always* being under siege by the Other—that is, in the Jaziran context, the Kurd/Muslim. This is well manifested in the reconstructions of the past massacres through an antagonistic discourse vis-à-vis the Kurds. This has led to the creation of a novel genre of narrative that of resistance stories which run alongside the narratives of suffering. Azix and 'Ayn Ward are the two *lieux de memoires* where the figure of the "resisting Syriac" is revealed both in the rememberings as well as in recent publications. 'Ayn Ward and Azix were the most famous sites of resistance, where Syriacs from different denominations took up arms and defended themselves against the Turkish gendarmes The incidents in Azix in 1926 will be described in the coming pages in another context. The memories of both events, however, conflate the 1915 massacres with the 1926 incidents in Azix and present them as one heroic instance of resistance. No matter what the historical record is about 1915, recent accounts present it as a conflict between two equal rival groups, instead of as a "helpless group of Christians under the tyranny of the Muslims," as it used to be represented in the 1930s.[339] The image of the barricaded church plays an important role in these narratives.

The Kurdish notion of victimhood is more *presentist*, and it is almost always accompanied by an active sense of resistance. Emphasis on state oppression, instead of a position of passive and fragile victimhood like that of the Syriacs, gives a hint of the discourse of resistance and self-empowerment vis-à-vis the state and the rest of the population in the context of recent developments in the wider region (the Kurdish liberation struggle, the de facto Kurdistan in Northern Iraq). Narratives of state oppression trigger the resistance discourse which is accompanied by expressions of determination. Thus, while World War I

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[338] For a critical evaluation of the nationalist intellectuals' stance on the gender issue, see Vahé Tachjian, "Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion: The Reintegration Process of Female Survivors of the Armenian Genocide", *Nations and Nationalism*, 15, 2009, pp. 60-80.

[339] According to an American missionary, they were given amnesty and so evaded deportation through the intervention of a German officer; PRO, FO 371/12265, Pol. Eastern Turkey, lettre du Révérend Pere E.W.McDowell, Mission Américaine de Mossoul, à Capitaine George F. Gracey, D.S.O, General Secretary "Friends of Armenia," 7 February 1927.

and the French mandate period are viewed as historical instances of missed opportunities, distress, adversity, and unfulfilled promises, present-day conflicts in Syrian Jazira do not remind the Kurds of the old *ferman* days in the way that they do for the Jaziran Christians. It reminds them, rather, of the Turkish cruelty which has been passed on in the form of Arab oppression in today's Syria.

Anxiety of Mixing and Memories of Difference

In the Syrian Jazira, the particular ways in which *ferman* and pre-*ferman* life are reconstructed, the categories employed in the narratives, the framework structuring the narrative, and the historical analyses regarding the massacres, all imply social and cultural difference.They evoke feelings of indignation, mournfulness, and sadness. The difference is articulated in an all-encompassing understanding of religion which is translated into the state-defined sect (*ta'ifa*). In other words, there is congruence between the community memory-practices and the state policy in the *ta'ifa* identity formation where the memory practices serve to consolidate the state-defined ta'ifa, instead of other potential belongings. The coherent and unified community that is conjured up through the memories of violence becomes the *tai'fa*. The memory practices serve to consolidate the state-defined *ta'ifa*, instead of other group belongings. (The state-defined *ta'ifa* is appropriated by the majority of the Armenian population and the Syriac population differently. While the Armenian *ta'ifa* bears more transnational undertones, the Syriacs' understanding of *ta'ifa* has relatively more Syrian and regional associations.)

The memories, then, speak of the nature of the relations between Christians and Muslims back in Turkey, yet they are informed by intercommunal and state–community (i.e. religious community) relations in present-day Syria. They suggest the markers of belonging to a Christian religious community in Syria. They imply the conveyer's stance vis-à-vis the Kurdish problem and the increasing segregation and polarization in present-day Syria.

To put it in other words, the past violence is constantly rewritten in terms of the present conflict. As several studies have demonstrated, "violence in every case plays itself out as historical re-enactment and fabrication of historical parallels."[340] I will illustrate how the

[340] Glenn Bowman's study about the transformation of the reconstructions of a killing that took place in a West Bank Palestinian town, Beit Sahour', before and after the Israeli-Palestinian Oslo treaty, from a man killed by the Israeli Defence Forces to an honour killing by a rival clan, and Shira Robinson's piece on the

present reality reshapes the memories by looking at two elements in the rememberings primarily of the Jaziran Syriacs and Armenians: the first concerns the categories of self and community employed in the historical narratives and how these narcissistic collective selves are in fact in accordance with the state-sponsored slots (*ta'ifa*) for governance in Syrian society. The second concerns the ways in which the Jaziran Syriacs and Armenians relate to the unrecognized group, the Kurds. More concretely, I will elaborate how the past violence that occurred prior to arrival in French-Syria is retrieved through a discourse of rivalry and hostility as well as a contentious disposition in relation to the Other, usually the Kurds. I will argue that the contours of the community are recast and markers of belonging are refined in the process of remembering the past violence through the social, political, and economic exigencies and insecurities of the present. Finally, I will draw attention to the political implications of this process and argue that what gives each community its substance and makes communo-spatial divides in Jazira real is not some set of primordial unities, but the repetition and recurrence of inequality and violence experienced by the generations still alive.

Descriptions of flight by the survivors and/or the first generation of Jaziran Christians who were born during or immediately after the massacres reveal that understandings of self, community, and the Other are transformed to a great extent in the new post-genocide world. Most significantly, religion starts to gain a new meaning. Religion starts to be detached from its social environment and treated as a cohesive, exclusivist, and organizing force. It is no longer just one of an agent's several belongings, but becomes one of the primary and exclusive markers of belonging to a community.

These narratives are usually characterized by legendary sacrifices and supernatural coincidences in a dreadful story of escape. Indeed, more often it is the Syriacs—who were less exposed to mass and sudden killings than the Armenians and were not deported in convoys—who imagine themselves as the "escapees." Mutual trust is nearly lost, although there are some extraordinary acts of assistance provided by some Muslims. Temporary sheltering or providing information about what was occurring in nearby villages is presented as examples of such acts of assistance. In the narratives, the survivors wander from one village to the other; they visit Christian and Muslim villages on their way. Roads and mountains are portrayed as either full of people (Christians) being or already massacred at the hands of Turkish soldiers and the local population, or with Christians running away from the "Big Death." They come across convoys (*qafiles*) on their way to a "un-foreknown place and

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memorialization of Kafr Qasim massacre in Palestine (1956) are good examples in this respect. Ussama Makdisi and Paul A. Silverstein, *Memory and Violence*, pp. 27- 49 and 103-32.

people," in which the caves and hollows are described as shelters on the path to "unforeseen destinies." Remembrances reveal that the old norms of morality of communal coexistence and traditional knowledge of the world have been dislocated by the state-sponsored killings, which occurred so suddenly and unexpectedly. Traditional shared and mutual commitments between the Christian and the Muslim/Kurdish groups on the basis of neighbourhood or friendship are deeply impaired. Nonetheless, the escapees still continue to make use of their old knowledge in order to manage the situation while new boundaries of belonging, self-definition, and definition of community are being formed. For instance, expressions of salutations like *rojate bi xêr bi* in Kurdish or *salam 'alaykum* in Arabic, which were hardly markers of differentiation between Christian and Muslim and most probably were used interchangeably at the time, are referred by an interviewee as the "Christian way" and the "Muslim way" of saluting, respectively. Despite the fact that the former salutation is linguistically Kurdish (than Christian as he argues), and the Muslims he encounters are most probably ethnic Kurds, *salam* '*alaykum*, the Islamic/Arabic version, is clearly beginning to gain new meanings in the post-genocide world. Kurds and Christians not easily discernible by their physical outlooks or the language they speak, yet subtleties of language become markers of belonging to the Christian community, which would gradually gain new political, social, and economic significance following their arrival in French-Syria.

Evidently, saluting is not the only marker of identity. My Syriac interviewee recounts that, after greeting Muslim/Kurdish villagers by saying *rojate bi xêr bi*, he was questioned by them in order to confirm whether he was Muslim/Kurdish or Christian. They bring in other markers of Christian-ness which were relevant in the aftermath of World War I—for example, they ask him if he has heard about '*Ayn Wardo* and the slaughtering. My interviewee recalls that he pretended he had come from Russia and had not heard about it; bluffing, he says that this is the first time he has heard about '*Ayn Wardo*, saying "'*Ayn Wardo* is a girl's name in our village."

These words come from one of my Syriac informants, Hanna, describing to me his flight to Midyat from his home village, Mizizex. (The village is owned by Elîkê Battê, the legendary figure who resisted the central Ottoman government in May 1919 together with Şamun Hanna; but Elîkê Battê's name is not mentioned even once in my interviewee's narrative.) His words give clues about how Christianity is written into the history of violence; how the "glorious" '*Ayn Wardo* incident has become public knowledge in the region and is considered by both Muslims and Christians as one of the markers of belonging to the Syriac-Christian community. The Muslim villagers believed his claim that he had not heard about

'Ayn Wardo, and thus was not a Christian, and they let him stay in their houses. Overcoming the "space of death" by "fooling" the "Muslims," the escapee instinctively knows the motivation underlying the Muslim villagers' inquiry and that his destiny will most probably be the same as his coreligionists': slaughter. This means that there is no absolute guarantee of survival other than escaping from *the* danger. The next place of refuge is a Christian house entered through the shield of *rojate bi xêr bi* and answered with the same code word, reassuring each party of their belonging to the same religious community. Offered food, a place to stay, a temporary family, and a job to sustain his livelihood, he arrives in Midyat, where the majority of the population is Syriac. Despite the fact that many historical accounts mention the political factionalism among different Syriac denominations sects in Midyat, my interviewees hardly mention the schisms within the community, but portray Midyat as devoid of the violence of the mountains.[341] His feeling of relief and familiarity increases in Midyat when he meets several other people not only from his home village, Mizizex, but also other Christians who had experienced the same violence. In other words, the common experience of violence provides him with sense of a (Christian) community. Being exposed to violence at the hands of the Other indeed becomes one of the markers of being a Christian. The history of Christianity is written into the history of violence.

Hanna is an elderly Kurmanji-Kurdish and Aramaic speaking, lower-class member of the Syriac community in Qamishli. After the first wave of violence abated and the second wave of slaughtering began, most likely in the mid 1920s, he started working in railway construction for a German company in Turkey.[342] After the famine in the Mardin region in the late 1930s, he made his way to the French Jazira: first to Mahmaqiyye, then to Tell Cihan, and later to Qamishli. He worked for several years as a smuggler with five Kurdish partners between Mardin, Midyat, and several towns of Syrian Jazira. Compared to the lower middle-class and the ex-elites of the community, his resentment against the Kurds as an ethnic group per se was not very emphasized throughout his story.

For the lower class Syriacs, especially those from the villages of Tour 'Abdin who were less directly affected by the massacres (for instance, those Syriacs originally from the village of Erbo), the *ferman* days take on the semblance of dark chaotic times, a short but

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[341] For 1915 in Midyat, see David Gaunt, *Massacres*, , pp. 275-80.
[342] It is not a mere coincidence that Hanna began working in railway construction. The railway construction was done under the control of the two aghas of Mizizax, one Kurdish and the other Syriac—Elikê Battê and Shamun, respectively.

inconsequential interval.[343] What they emphasize in their narratives are scenes of famine, lack of security and safety, and the compulsory military service in Turkey—in particular the 1941 Korean War. Working as peasants both before and following their arrival in Jazira in the late 1940s, where they kept alive the hope of return until the 1970s, religious difference is an important marker of identity; yet local undertones in religious identity do still exist. They do not differentiate themselves only from the Muslims/Kurds; there is a strong emphasis on the *shared* hardship which the different ethno-religious peoples of the region, Christians and Muslims alike, had suffered following the *ferman* and poverty. Unlike the urban middle-class Syriacs, they do not hold a coherent and exclusive understanding of community and religion. Indeed, intra-communal hierarchies in terms of class or the urban–countryside axis are more evident in their narratives of their flight to Jazira. As much as they differentiate themselves from the Kurds mostly on religious grounds, but not in socio-cultural terms and refer to themselves as Kurdo-Syriac, they express their difference from the Mardinli urban-Syriacs, usually in cultural terms.

Their narratives of the *ferman* are not necessarily informed by an all-encompassing sectarian discourse of difference. Not that religious difference did not matter between the *Erbowiyyin* (those from Erbo) and the Kurds, and not that they do not view the *ferman* as a violent *attack* against the *local* community which was located in Erbo and dependent on a certain generous or harsh Kurdish or Syriac agha, and on good or bad terms with the Muslim (Kurdish) villagers or the Syriac villagers living in the region. Unlike the middle-class urban Syriacs and the ex-elites of Jazira, who are anxious and threatened by the growth and prosperity of the Kurds in present-day Qamishli, the lower class Syriacs from rural backgrounds feel themselves less threatened by the expanding Kurdish population in today's Syria; thus Kurds do not appear as the absolute Other in their historical narratives. Their trips to the French Jazira as seasonal workers in the early 1940s are not narrated through a sectarian discourse of religion. They usually convey that the Kurds, too, used to travel from Tour 'Abdin to Jazira as seasonal workers, and smuggled tea and tobacco just as they used to do. Nor is their final settlement in Jazira in the late 1940s viewed as a flight from the cruelty of the Kurds in Turkey. They do not refrain from revealing the fact that they settled in the border villages where half of the village population comprised Kurds and the rest Syriacs.

I do not claim that in the outskirts of Jazira there is an authentic group of people living in isolated neighbourhoods called *Erbowiyya* who do not identify themselves communally

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[343] For Erbo, see Aphram Barsoum, *Tarikh Tur Abdin* [in Syriac], translated into Arabic by B. Bahnam, (Lebanon: n.p., 1963).

(*ta'ifi*) or nationally. It is not the case that they are unaffected by the requirements of the capitalist market economy and the Syrian regime. But the fact that their religious belonging is not totally dissociated from their local allegiances and does not turn into an *idiom* which embodies other markers of difference or through which they assert their differences, suggests that class, culture, and ideology play a significant role in the articulation of communal belongings. The examples below will make this point more clear.

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For the majority of the Syriacs in Qamishli, especially those who arrived in French-Syria before 1940, the state-sponsored massacres of World War I are remembered within the confines of an inherent religious war between Islam/Muslims and Christianity/Christians, where the category of "Muslim" is not identified with the Arab, but refers to the Kurds and, more rarely, to the Turks. The Assyrian empire and the ancient Arameans of the region, who were converted to Islam following the Islamic conquest of Mesopotamia, turn out to be the classical examples proving the authentic Christianness of the region and the historicity of the subjugation of the Christians to the Muslim rule. The massacres are almost always depicted as an attack, or at best a *siege*, by the Kurds (of Jazira) on the lives of the Christians. Especially for the middle-class Jaziran Syriacs and those Armenians active in the establishment institutions such as the church or Armenian cultural institutions, the 1915 *ferman* conjures up memories of violence at the hands of the Kurds. More significantly, it invokes indignation and aversion towards the present-day Kurds, their actual fellow townsmen. The fact that the Kurds were exposed to Turkish state violence only ten years after the 1915 genocide is rarely included in anti-state discourse; and when it is mentioned, it triggers the discourse of difference, as the violent oppression of the Sheikh Said Revolt is usually viewed as "divine justice in return for violent and greedy undertakings against the Christians in 1915."

> The Kurds slaughtered us, because we were Christians. They thought that they'd be rewarded with a piece of land in paradise in return for their actions. We were a well-to-do community and they were poor peasants. They assumed that they would seize our lands and become rich … but no way … in the end, they didn't gain anything, on the contrary, they took the air in return … [344]

[344] Fadiya, Seyran, Semiramis, interview with the author, March 2005, Qamishli, Syria.

The fact that the Kurds were also expelled from their homes and had to find refuge in Syria at around the same time and under similar conditions to the Christians is usually silenced in the Syriacs' post-memories. The Kurds' flight to Syria is usually perceived as due to their poverty in Turkey and their search for economic fortunes. Besides this, and more significantly, the arrival of the Kurds in the region is believed to have taken place as late as the 1950s. Despite the fact that Kurds from Mardin and its environs started to head towards Jazira from the mid 1920s, at times with their Armenian neighbours, after the violent oppression during and after the Sheikh Said Revolt, their flight is depoliticized and placed later in time, while the Christians' own refuge is written into the history of violence of 1915. In reality, many Syriacs from Tour 'Abdin came to Syrian Jazira in the late 1930, in the early 1940s, or as seasonal workers up until the 1960s, due to the extremely poor living conditions in Turkish-Kurdistan. The following represents the Syriac middle classes' common sense description concerning the Kurdish migration to Jazira.

> It was in the 1950s that they [Kurds] started coming down firstly as seasonal workers as they had big families to feed (unlike us) and they looked for their fortune in the well-to-do economic situation of 1950s Jazira. Afterwards, they brought their families and settled here.

However, several reports from the French mandate period drafted either by the French officers or missionaries in the region argue the opposite. The Dominican missionaries in the Mardin region in particular describe the rural Christians of the region as not much different from the Kurds in terms of physical appearance and "superstitious beliefs." Even the Dominican missionaries who arrived in the French Jazira in 1936 shared the same perspective and often used terms like *Kurdo-Chrétiens*, *Assyro-Kurdes*, and *Kurdo-Arméniens* to describe the Syriacs of Tour 'Abdin, Assyrians, or the Armenians from the same region. "Muslim-Kurds" was another label used by the local French officers to differentiate the "Kurds" from the "Christians." Poidebard in his notes on the situation of refugees in High-Jazira wrote that "some of them come to make trade in the frontier posts, a lot of them are originally from Mardin and the neighbouring mountain, Jabal Tour. The young men of the Jabal are arriving with their families to join the *Légion Syrienne*[345] which has already recruited a small number of Assyrio-Chaldeans at Hassatche." He continued as follows:

> Il faut noter qu'il ya de nombreux chrétiens de race kurde. La tribu de Hadjo agha [Averkiyye] est à moitié chrétienne et à moitié musulmane de rite Sunnite. Cette tribu était entre Nisibin et

[345] *Légion Syrienne* is the name given to Syrian armed forces formed by the French and which recruited a disproportinate number of non-Muslim and Non Arab Syrians into its ranks. It was then named after *Troupes Auxiliaires* and finally in 1930 as *Troupes Spéciales du Levant.*

> Kubur al bid. Dans la montagne Omerian [Jabal Omeryan, Jabal Mardin], les Chrétiens étaient en mélange avec les kurdes. Cette identité d'origine et de race facilitait les rapports entre les Kurdes et Chrétiens. Les montagnards du Jabal kurde sont en majorité jacobites et très peu différents des Kurdes, comme la vie. Les Syriens catholiques, plus policés, forent la vielle colonie d'Amouda et une partie de celle de Kamechliyé où ils sont venus de Hassatche en 1927.[346]

The difference in the (post)memories between different actors and over time shows that it is the power relations that make a difference and indeed "precede the narrative proper and enter into the process of producing historical narratives."[347]

The discourse of difference intrinsic to the middle class Jaziran Christians' memories implies an "anxiety of mixing." In the memories of difference, any altruistic act of sheltering or hosting of a Christian by a Kurdish household following the mass killings—if even mentioned at all—does not rehabilitate the mistrust and disillusionment of the "Christians" against the "Muslims." Despite the fact that their survival proves the continuing validity of old rules of morality (such as friendship, hospitality, or protection provided by the Kurdish agha) and that cruelty, discrimination, and conflict have not become the dominant mode, this is not enough to rebuild the old world. Such counterexamples do not modify the general rule of difference as revealed in the words of an elder Aleppan Armenian woman, originally from Sason: "there were some good Turks, but they also feared of the evil majority." Her words also suggest that survival is usually conceived as contingent: that it comes either if "the Christian" is lucky enough to be able to deceive the "Muslim," or if a supernatural religious event happened.(I heard several stories about women whose essential Armenianness or Christianity kept them from evil forces, particularly the Turkish agha or the Kurdish villager, respectively.)

The two examples below, the first one from an interview with an elderly Armenian woman residing in Aleppo and the second one from the petitions addressing the colonial authorities in the early 1930s, will demonstrate that memory work must be understood both in the context of the social actors involved in its production and the social conditions of its production.

The Armenian community in Aleppo—a Sunni-Arab-dominated city having the largest Armenian population, with approximately 15,000 families, most of whom fled to

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[346] CADN, Syrie-Liban, Cabinet Politique, Box 569, Situation des refugies en Haute Djézireh octobre 1927, Père Poidebard, no 327/K2.
[347] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, pp. 28-29.

Aleppo between 1915 and 1921 from middle and southern Anatolia—is construed first and foremost as an ethno-religious community whose Other is the Turk, its state officers, its soldiers, and the local population. In line with the dominant Armenian nationalist narrative, 1915 stands out as the milestone of the catastrophe, the stories of which are relatively more objectified and codified than those of the Jazirans. Descriptions of slaughter, cruelty, and brutality at the hands of the Muslims/Turks are explicitly and overtly pronounced. Stories of the *seferberlik*—where the collective pronoun "we" is mixed with the singular "I" or "she"—are at times interlinked with the religious imagination, which one rarely comes across in Jazira. An elderly Aleppan lady whose mother was a genocide survivor from Urfa and who lives on the charity of the notables of the Armenian community, described to me in detail in an Urfalı-Turkish accent how killings and deportations were carried out at a totally unexpected time. Her story was followed by rather surreal stories of flight from the oppression of the Muslim-Turkish agha after deceiving him on one of the holy Sundays. Alone, chasing the bells of a church, and getting directions from a saintly man on her way, she finally arrives at what is most probably a Syriac church in Mardin and enters it. The henchmen of the Turkish-Muslim agha follow the girl and enter the church, but they are divinely prevented from seeing or capturing any person within it. After staying for six months in this Syriac church, which had turned into an orphanage for Armenians, she returns to Urfa with the hope that she might meet someone from her family and continue her life there. But there was no one left behind; everyone had already been killed.

In the Aleppans' narratives in general, references to Kurds—not only as a group back in Turkey, but as a coherent ethno-religious group *both* "back there" and "out here in our midst"—do not exist at all. This, in itself, demonstrates the contextual and mediated nature of memories. Unlike what is the case in Jazira, the old Aleppan lady feels neither socially, economically, nor politically insecure due to the presence of the Kurds, and there is an absence of expressions of anxiety through the culturalist supremacist discourse of difference. The state's "successful attempts" in checking the Islamist challenge in Aleppo, and the Armenian community's decency and organization within the city, provide a certain dose of "safety" to its Christian citizens. In other words, the "contingency factor," something liable to happen as an adjunct to or as a result of something else, is less evident in Aleppo. The Kurdish issue is not there; as well as this, the Aleppan Christian elites were more flexible in their attempts to contain and be contained by the Ba'thi rule, unlike ex-urban notables of the French Jazira.

Jaziran Armenians' post(memories) surely vary according to class, relations with the establishment, education, and so on. Still, they usually revolve around the slaughter, cruelty, and brutality experienced at the local village or town level. Both the outrageous size and simultaneity of the massacres and the active political/cultural activity of the Armenian nationalist political parties today usually enable them to single out the Turkish state's role, regardless of the fact that the massacres were realized at the hands of certain local Kurds. Depending on one's standing within the overall structures of power relations in Jaziran Syria, the protective attempts of other Kurdish locals may even be mentioned. 1915 is depicted as the crucial event that disturbed the old terms of belonging, but it does not denote the one and only wave of violence. It is depicted as the *first* ferman, which would be followed by the *second* one in 1925—the *ferman* on the Kurds. The emphasis is usually on the state-sponsored organized crime aspect of the massacres, rather than the complicit agents or the "rivalling Kurdish community," as is the case in the middle-class Syriac narratives.

Unlike the mainstream Syriac manner of compliance, Syrian Armenian mainstream discourse endows a discourse of disregard vis-à-vis domestic Syrian issues, yet at the same time does not refrain from praising the "generous hospitality of the Arabs towards their guests."[348] As well as this, more often with the lower-class Armenians in Jazira who are less susceptible to the disciplining effect of the establishment and the Syrian state, the "unfortunate fate of the Kurds" is taken to prove the "unreliability and violence" of the Turkish state and the Turks in general.

> The Kurds regret it [*nedman ederler*]; but the Turks do not, Turks are still cruel [*zalim*].

It is not rare to find middle-aged and elderly Armenians for whom the memories of the *ferman*, unlike the dominant feeling of aversion among the Syriacs, evoke mourning for the life that is gone forever and regret for the past complicity of their peers.

Still, class and power—such as one's relation to the establishment institutions—matter to a great extent in the shape of the post-memories. The narrative of an elderly Kurdophone Armenian lady from Qamishli and the "corrective attempts"[349] of the priest accompanying me

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[348] The next chapter will discuss the discourse of harmony regarding the relation between the local population and the refugees. It will demonstrate that this discourse is indeed a post-independence Syrian construct.
[349] Here I refer to the coup d'état of Hafiz al-Assad in 1970, the so-called "corrective moment" (*al- haraka al-tashihiyya*).

(who also helped me to translate her speech from Kurdish to Arabic) reveal how present day power relations are played out in an anti-Kurdish discourse in the 1915 narrative of the priest.

> My name is Seyran and I am from the village Blundi, close to Diyarbekir and to Bişeri. Our village was close to the Kire monastery. The Armenians and the Yaqubis [Syriacs]used to visit the monastery to get baptized. We are originally from Sâsun, but later we settled in Bişeri … We didn't know [how to read and write] like this girl does. We didn't know anything … Not only my mother or mother in law, but all the people lost their husbands, their sons, their kids. When I was a young girl they always used to speak about the *ferman*, how they were put into the pits, cavities and killed with stones, not even by bullets since bullets are more costly … It is the Turks who killed. After the *ferman* was decreed, the Christians began to be frightened. But then, we were told that not all the people were going to be killed, but only the high esteemed people such as the priests. But, they didn't keep their promise and they killed them all. They gathered all the men in the centre of the village and then they took them to the outside of the village and shot them with machine guns. Only the women and the children were left in the village. The women in the village started cooking and taking the food to their families. One day, a Turkish soldier met a woman and asked her where she was going. The woman answered him back that she was taking food to her family because they were imprisoned. The soldier was very harsh to her, he ordered her to return to her house because the next day would be their turn. Then the day after this incident, they killed the women and the children. But my uncle survived because they told him that "It is a pity. You are not a man to be killed." He asked them "why didn't you kill me?" and they said because you are a handsome man. Then they told him that they would let him go free once they possessed his wife. They found the wife and then killed him. …
>
> Then there is a man, the landlord of the village, Heji Mihemed Musti. He was such a nice man. He saved the lives of a lot of Christians, once he hid thirty Christians in his own house. We indeed survived thanks to Heji Mihemed. But a lot of Christians died because of sickness, sickness due to fear. I didn't see it with my own eyes, but they say that they put three candles on his cemetery to praise him … Then there was a woman, she survived because they didn't notice her since she hid herself under the bodies of the killed. This woman was fleeing from her village and on the way she was crying all the time so her eyes were swollen, she became nearly blind. She even didn't notice that she had arrived at a village. Then a Muslim woman saw her and gave her bread and milk and by this way she was able to survive.

The words of this elderly woman were cut into by the priest who was continuously intervening in her talk and correcting her "mistakes." The following is the "corrected version" by the priest, who, in other words, imposed the dominant Jaziran meta-narrative on Herstory.

> "There were indeed two *ferman*. In the first *ferman* they just killed the respected people, intellectuals and the priests and the administrators. It wasn't the Turks but the Kurds who killed us. Because according to my knowledge, the percentage of the Turks in that region wasn't more than 5 percent. So perhaps you [i.e. the present author] can go to my village when you return to Turkey and convince your officials and say to them that there is injustice and discrimination in the issue. And say that this land belongs to Priest Manouk, not to the Kurds, that is to say their enemy. They

wouldn't be disturbed by you because you are a Muslim, too, and they would be pleased to return the land to you rather than having a Kurd owning the land."[350]

Reconstruction of the 1915 Massacres in the 1930s

Descriptions of the 1915 genocide in the appeals and petitions addressing the French colonial authorities in the 1920s, drafted by secular or religious elites usually outside Turkey on behalf of the Christians living in the peripheral parts of Turkish-Kurdistan in the mid 1920s, are valuable sources in displaying how the markers of self and the other change depending on context and the social actors. The fact that these petitions are drafted by the secular or religious elites of the community point to these elites' vested interests in generating coherence within the otherwise locally, linguistically, and regionally differentiated community for their own political and economic ends. Makdisi states that "sectarianism emerged as a vehicle by which religious elites attempted to transform their respective religious communities, hitherto quiescent and supportive of a non-sectarian polity, into mobilized but rigidly ordered political communities. The Maronite church took the lead in this endeavour to forge a single and coherent political *ta'ifa*."[351] The religious elites addressing the colonial power on behalf of their respective communities also attempted to undertake a similar task in French-Syria.

The example below concerns the local Syriac population of Azix in the late 1920s. Azix is a small town in Turkey situated at the eastern end of the Tour 'Abdin mountains, close to where the Turkish, Syrian and Iraqi borders meet after the delimitation of the Turco-Syrian and Turco-Iraqi borders. The petitions, which ask for protection for the Christians of Azix come from different sources ranging from British humanitarian aid representatives to the religious elites and the local population itself. Each actor reconstructs the history (of the massacres) and represents Christians and Christianity in different ways.

Azix found itself located at the intersection of the Iraqi, Turkish, and Syrian borders. Yet, in 1926, following the violent crushing of the Sheikh Said Rebellion, and at the height of the Mosul conflict (1926), the Tour 'Abdin region and its immediate surroundings could not escape the Turkish state's oppressive centralization efforts in line with the post–Sheikh Said security measures. In 1926 the Turkish army occupied the St. Ephraim monastery and the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate building in Mardin. Following the occupations, the latter interfered in villages by military means, first in the beginning of 1926 and a second time in

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[350] Qas Manouk, May 2006, Qamishli Syria, interview by the author.
[351] Ussama Makdisi, "Revisiting Sectarianism," in Scheffler, Thomas (ed.), *Religion between Violence and Reconciliation* (Beirut: Orient-Institut/Ergon Verlag, 2002), p. 184

December 1927. The Turkish authorities accused the villagers of Azix of being complicit in the Sheikh Said Revolt and of having British arms.[352] The Turkish interference in the village started with a general disarmament of the villagers and was followed by the arrest of the notables, the male villagers, and the priests of Azix.[353] According to the report by the Syriac Orthodox, Chaldean, and Syriac Catholic religious authorities of Baghdad, 150 men from the notables of Tour ʻAbdin (Midyat, ʻAin Ward, Enhel, Mizizex, Meddo) and 357 from Azix were accused of treason against the Turkish state and collaboration with the British, and thus were arrested and exiled to Mardin.[354]

Following the incidents, the general secretary of the Relief Agency Friends of Armenia, Mr. Gracey, appealed to the British government in the name of this "oppressed humanity," to free this village from harassment and extinction and for the release of the Azix people, especially "the aged and half-blind bishop" who was taken to Diyarbekir:

> The Turkish state is wiping out the undesirable elements. The males of the village in the west of Jazirah ibn Omar have been massacred due to their alleged complicity with the Hajo revolt.[355]

The Syrian Catholic Patriarch from Baghdad, alarmed by the possibility of the slightest degree of "mixing" between the Christians and Kurds (who were treated as mutually exclusive groups under the new colonial regimes in British-Iraq and French-Syria), wrote that "they are accused of helping the Kurds but actually they are on the worst of terms with them." He stated that the Turks intended to remove all non-Christians from the frontier line and replace them with Turkish elements brought from Asia Minor. The Catholic Syriac Archbishop in Baghdad stated in his note to the Syrian patriarchate in Aleppo that

> 1,500 Turkish soldiers entered the village, collected the arms, captured 357 men with 3 priests. They were first taken to Jazira [Cizre] and ill-treated, then taken to Mardin and Diyarbekir and

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[352] According to the British accounts, the Turkish intervention in the area rested on the discovery of British rifles among the local Azix population with permits in Arabic and English to carry arms. These permits, according to the Turkish authorities, proved that the local Azix men served in the British-Iraqi army. PRO, FO 371/11473, E 2938/530/65-From League of Nations to Eastern General.

[353] PRO, FO 371/12265, Pol. Eastern Turkey, letter of Thomas, Archevêque ancien de Mossoul, Mgr. Joseph Ghanima, Evêque chaldéen, Mgr. Michel Mourad, vicaire de archevêque Syrien, Dominique Besre, Délègue Apostolique à Baghdad, to the President of the committee of League of Nations, Mosul, 12 April 1926. Yousef Jabrail al-Qas and Dr. Elias Hadaye, *Azikh: Ahdath wa Rijal* [Azikh: Events and Men] (Aleppo: Dar al-Raha,1991), pp. 93-95.

[354] Ibid.

[355] PRO, FO 371/12265, Pol. Eastern Turkey, lettre du Révérend Pere E.W. Mc Dowell, Mission Américaine de Mossoul, à Capitaine George F. Gracey, D.S.O, General Secretary "Friends of Armenia," 7 February 1927.

> massacred. There are now 1,000 remaining women, girls, elderly and they are surrounded by Kurds who have always been their bitterest enemies. They are now at the mercy of Kurds who are the oldest enemies of the people of Azekh.[356]

The Syriac-Catholic archbishop in Aleppo, Tappouni, who had been a fervent supporter of the French mandate rule in Syria, drafted a letter addressing the French High Commissariat calling for the French intervention for the "relief of these miserable Christians who have never found any peace in this ill-fated region and … are haunted by the fear of another deportation and massacre at the hands of the cruel Turkish government." Indeed, stated Tappouni, "the Christians are willing to adopt Syrian citizenship in line with the Lausanne treaty, but they are dreaded by the cruel Turkish state as it forbids any the cross-frontier passages."[357]

The petitions sketched by the religious elites asking for French protection for the Christians of Azix write the history of the region into the history of Eastern Christianity and its absolute (subordinate) relation to Islam. Kurds as a community appear in the general picture only within the context of this essentialist "subjugating Muslim" vs. "Christian victim" dichotomy. The cover-reports reflect a sectarian image through casting the politically and economically informed hostilities as an age-old hostility between the Kurds (referred to as Muslims) and the Christians of the region. Distinguishing the Christians, conceived of as a distinct "race" from the Kurds, who are depicted as backward (tribal), unreliable, and economically greedy, the reports reinforce orientalist constructions in which the Christian is the victim and the Muslim the aggressor. Since "fanaticism and extremism are intrinsic to Muslims," argue the drafters of the petitions, in line with the colonial French understanding, the Christians legitimately need a "protector."

The second example concerns the Armenians of Bişêrî, in 1929, where several of my interviewees are originally from—nowadays the Kurdish-dominated town of Batman in Turkey. Labelled Kurdo-Armenians in the accounts of the Dominican missionaries as late as late 1930s, or as Kurdo-Chrétiens by the French Intelligence Service officers in Jazira, Armenians from Bişêrî, arrived in Syrian Jazira in the late 1920s following the Sheikh Said Revolt. The Armenian nationalist organizations made efforts to turn these "Kurdo-Arméniens" into "proper Armenians," first by teaching them their "true language," Armenian,

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[356] Ibid.
[357] PRO, FO 371, E 2748/530/65, from Consul General, Satow (Beirut) to Eastern General, "Ill treatment of Christians at Azekh by Turks," 27 April 1926.

and later introducing them to the "true" Christianity.[358] The well-to-do or more settled community leaders from Aleppo and Beirut embraced another task in the general division of labour. Being the "white men" of their community in transformation, they had the "burden" of appealing to the French authorities for protection and support on behalf of the newcomers. A report entitled "The Treatment of Minorities/Christians in Turkey" reads as follows:

> The Armenians of Bisherik, who, for centuries, have maintained their Christian faith and nationality among the Turkish and Kurdish hostile elements, are now thrown away through the Syrian frontier. In the province of Diyarbekir, as well as in all the Anatolian provinces, the surviving Armenians are forced into exile after having been entirely plundered and stripped of all their estate and properties and forced to go away nearly naked and hungry. Still under the heart-breaking blow of being separated from our mountains and fields, from our churches, our secular memories and cemeteries, we are now facing the imperious necessity of our daily bread and of a roof for the forthcoming winter. For this we want your brotherly assistance. We are not beggars, we are not accustomed to live on charity. The only thing we want is that you should lend us means for securing land, dwellings, and work. We are sure that soon we will be self-supporting, and we will pay our debts, always remembering your help with gratitude.
>
> Gregor Sarkisyan and Rabush Ohanian
>
> Signed by L. Paşaliyan (representative of the Armenian Refugees Central Committee on the League of Nations Advisory Committee of the High Commission for Refugees)[359]

Unlike the present-day Jaziran Armenian common sense, the above account appeals to the dominant French discourse about Syrian society and its insistence on essential differences between Christians and Muslims, which indeed formed one of the key legitimating factors in the French intervention in Syria and Lebanon.

The excerpt below is written by an Armenian Xoyboun member, Aris Ohannes Moure, during his revolutionary mission in French Jazira among the Kurdish tribes of the region, most probably with the knowledge of the British authorities in Iraq, in the same years as the above petition was written. The inconsistency between his account and the above portrayal of the Armenian and Kurdish communities, and his aspiration for a "union between the Kurds and the Armenians with the British policy," may seem absurd. However, its absurdity is indicative of the role of politics and ideology in the different re-presentations of the community.

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[358] Nureddin Zaza in his memoirs mentions the Armenian Tashnak members who undertook acculturation activities in Qamishli among the Armenians from Bisheriyye, who lacked the "necessary traits of being a proper Armenian by teaching them the language and the religion." Nureddin Zaza, *Bir Kürt Olarak Yaşamım* (Peri: Istanbul, 2000).

[359] PRO FO 371-13827, E 6397/1971/44, expulsion of Armenians from Turkey to Syria, memorandum of MR. Rendell, 9 December 1929.

> Most of the villages I have visited personally and lived amongst the people and have spoken to them about their being of Armenian origin. Of course there I found some who at first sight were against this propaganda, but I did not leave them till I put in their hard brains "Ez Irmani" (which means I am Armenian). I should point out that the Kurds living in the French territory are to a certain extent inclined to Armenianism, without interfering with their religion, having their Shaikhs and Mollas amongst them. In order to give you an idea about the present Kurdish feelings, I quote down the conversation which very often took place between me and the Kurds.
> Q: What is your nationality?
> A: Armenian
> Q: What is your religion?
> A: Islam
> Q: What is your sect?
> A: Shafi
> Q: Where is your district?
> A: Diarbakr
> Q: To what tribe do you belong?
> A: Rashkot [Reshkotan/Bisheri]
> Q: What is the difference between you and the Armenian?
> A: Religion.[360]

Nonetheless, the reports and petitions written by the local population and attached to the above mentioned letters are less analytic and more fragmented. Compared to the all-encompassing and totalizing religious categories employed in the cover letters or appeals, the petitions cite local conflicts within the community and provide the reader with a more complex view of the local community. Despite the fact that the main goal of the petitions was arguably to demonstrate to the "coreligionist foreign protectors" how the Christians as a whole are ill-treated at the hands of a "cruel Turkish state and their local collaborators," the accounts are full of details which indeed disrupt the neat and dichotomous Western categories as far as Muslim–Christian relations are concerned.

A detailed petition signed by "all the men of Azix" on 4 January 1926 is a relevant example here. The petition opens with descriptions of the Turkish military intervention and its violent enforcement in the villages. In general, the account attempts to display how the "Muslim tribes" denounced them (the Christians) with false charges in order to arouse the Turkish officers to deport and massacre them. Yet, the categories used in the narrative of the violent incidents are more contingent and locally-informed. Ethnic and religious categories are rather unstable; incommensurable categories coexist at the same time. For examples, in

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[360] The file includes some of the correspondences between Vahan Papazian and Aris O. Moar. PRO, FO 371, 12255, C.I.D. memo. No. S.B/574 of 30.5.27 with enclosures, Secret 'A', from H. Dobbs, High Commissioner for Iraq to L.C.M.S. Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies, and to his Britannic Majesty's Ambassador, Constantinople, and to his Majesty's Consul-General, Beyrouth, 2 June 1927, Baghdad.

passing, the petition mentions the intra-confessional conflict that occurred in one of the neighbouring towns to Azix, which is argued to have led the way to the disarmament and arrest of the Christians in the Tour ‘Abdin region.

> The evil Malké, son of Barsoum, sided with the Turkish government forces and accused Hanna, son of Hanna Karismo, of hiding British weapons and arms. He even spied on his son-in-law. The same Malké accused the patriarch Elias of treason, that the patriarch had sent a letter to Bishop Jean to make sure the Christian forces rebel against the “holy” Turkish Republic.[361]

This piece of information in a way unmakes the sectarian understanding of a decontextualized religion and homogonous community; nevertheless, the same petition does not refrain from describing—to use Watenpaugh’s words—the “genetic predisposition of Muslims/Kurds/tribes toward murder and mayhem.”[362] According to the petition, the Azix incidents terminate as soon as the Turkish military officer (commander) receives an order to leave Azix due to the revolt of the “Kurdish tribes” around Siirt. The account continues by mentioning the fear of deportation and massacre among the villagers in case the commander returns to the village to demolish it. The petition also calls attention to the impoverishment of the villages due to the expenses (of feeding the Turkish soldiers), *bacchiche*s (bribes), and the cost of the collected weapons. The petition by the locals ends by stating that the Christians were “helpless and confused Christians like *ivrognes* [drunkards].”

Despite the fact that the style of the local petitions is much less formal and more vernacular, the petitioners were very well aware of their task: they were asking for protection from a colonial power which legitimized its rule on the basis of protection of the Christian minorities of the Levant. To this end, they always attempted to depict the otherwise unstable and fragmented religious community as a coherent unit in need of protection. This conscious attempt by the local population will become more obvious when the above petitions are compared with the appeal, below, written from Midyat, the biggest town in Tour ‘Abdin, addressing not the imperial authorities but sent directly to the Syriac notables already residing in Jazira:

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[361] PRO, FO 371/E2938/530/65, from League of Nations to Eastern general, Position of Christians in the Jabal Tour region, 11 May 1926.
[362] Keith Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 207.

> Our government made a special law for our exile in Turkey, especially for a big part of the Christians. We don't know what to do. The carrier of the letter is going to explain to you the situation in more detail.
>
> In case we want to show up at yours, do we have the right to do that, do we have a place, are we going to be accepted as refugees?
>
> Will the government tolerate us or not?
>
> Do we have the right to settle close to the frontier, for instance in Kamishli or somewhere close?
>
> We are afraid of being removed away from the frontier to Beirut or to Damascus like the Tayyaris.
>
> If your government favours our demands, a lot of people from the mountain and villages of Midiat, both Christian and Muslim, are going to come.[363]

Upon their arrival, the petitions of the newcomers, usually written on behalf of a group of newcomer Armenian or Christian families due to the Turkish-state-sponsored massacres, begin to relate to a more coherent category of Christian. In the late years of the French mandate, the petitions would increasingly employ an all-encompassing and exclusive understanding of Christian community in relation to, or surrounded by, a hostile Muslim community and its state.

Like the post-memories, the notion of victimhood used to be the dominant topos in the petitions of the religious elite on the massacres of 1915. In the local written accounts penned by the local religious priests, the 1915 genocide and the ethnic cleansing of the 1920s are written into the "victimhood history of Christians under the Muslim yoke." The slaughtering of the "loyal and docile Syriacs together with the Armenians" and "conversion to Islam by force" are depicted as proofs of an age-old religious war, that is, an eternal Muslim assault on the Christians.[364] The local Muslim population/Kurds are singled out as blameworthy in the 1915 genocide and afterwards.

> The Kurdish notables of Cizre and the local Kurdish leaders around Azix deceived the local [Turkish] governor that the people ofAzix were indeed Armenians, thus to be massacred … they gave a bribe to the Turkish commandment to kill the Syriacs.[365]

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[363] CADN, Cabinet Politique 586, 1258/EU/SP, "Lettre de Midiat reçu par des notables de Kamichlie," de Colonel Jacqout, délègue adjoint de HC pour les territoires de l'Euphrate, à Monsieur de HC de la république française, délégation de Deir ez Zor, 20 Juillet 1934. Assyrian Tiarie/Tyarai tribe in Iraq who were first settled in Derik and then exiled to the inner Syria.
[364] Hori Süleyman Hinno, *Farman*, p. 24.
[365] Xori Slayman □ënno Arka□oyo,"Bet-Zabday/Hazax (İdil) ve Civar Köylerinde", pp. 17-20.

However, a closer reading of these written accounts would reveal that "Muslim fanaticism" or "communal hatred" was not the norm but, rather, that an understanding of religion that was embedded in local power relationships was still powerful even immediately after the peak of the bloodshed. In other words, religion was an organic part of the local order of things. In the sectarian logic, however, the only type of interaction between different religious communities is assumed to be conflict; thus, any experience of contact and mixture is marginalized in the general narrative. For instance, the protection provided by the Çelebi agha Saruxan, one of the local Kurdish tribal leaders, or the political factionalism in another Kurdish tribe in the region, Hevêrkan (factionalism in Hevêrkan corresponds to collaborating with the Ottoman state in the massacres or being against it), are only mentioned in passing and are never made an organic part of the general narrative.[366] Similarly, the Syriacs of Nusaybin taking refugee in the Kurdish villages in order to escape from the World War I military mobilization is never incorporated into the general sectarian picture.[367] Mirzo agha,[368] who saved the lives of several Armenians in Zercil (in today's Şırnak), and others are neglected if not silenced. Since the main argument of these narratives is based on an ahistorical premise that "Muslims have always attacked the Christians," any thread of coexistence is easily understated.[369] Even if a brief mentioning of "protection of Christians by the local Kurds" is made, the agents of protection are referred to as "aghas." This traditional secular identity is not conflated with the categories of tribes, Kurds, or Muslims, who are singled out as age-old enemies.[370] Moreover, the protection provided by the aghas, the representatives of the old regime, is portrayed necessarily as a "self-interest-seeking action,"[371] which means that the agha's traditional elite role is now blended with his inherently hostile Muslim fanaticism in the sectarian French mandate age.

The difference in the representations of community between the post-memories of violence in present-day Jazira and the petitions addressing the mandatory authorities upon the arrival of the refugees or the text written by a member of the Xoyboun in the above examples proves that hegemonic power relations have an important role in informing the imaginations

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[366] Hinno, *Farman*, p. 27.
[367] Ibid., p. 30.
[368] Mirzo agha, together with Kör Hüseyin Paşa, were exiled to Damascus by the republican government after the Ararat revolt. See www.welatperez.com.
[369] Hori Hinno's work is praised by the Turkish nationalists as it depicts the Muslims/Kurds/tribes (he uses these three interchangeably) as the perpetrators while silencing the role of the Turkish state in the massacres of the Christians/Syriacs. He also highlights the loyalty of the Syriac community towards the Ottomans/Turkish state in order to demonstrate the unjust treatment that the Syriac community is exposed to.
[370] al-Qas and Hadaya, *Azix*, p. 52.
[371] Ibid. p. 25.

of the self, community, and relation with the Other. While it was the French colonial politics of difference which the local elites addressed in their petitions, it is the current Syrian regime, its politics, and its material implications that provide them with the tools in order to reconfigure the past and discipline the difference. The narratives in the memories reflect and reinforce—yet also at times counter—the prevailing hegemonic order in Syria. This order grants the "white Christians", namely the politically conformist, middle class Christians with *relative* safety and protection in Syria under a repressive regime where the Islamist and Kurdish challenges to it are gaining ground and the efforts of secular Arabism and socialism to create more equal and decent societies have failed in an age of rising global Islamism. The regime sustains its authoritarian rule by this populist sectarian system, through emphasizing the difference, and building up inequalities between each bloc in order to prevent the formation of a discourse of commonality cross-cutting different ethnic and religious groups.

Silencing the Present in Syrian Jazira through the Past Violence in Turkey: Civilizational Hierarchy and New Categories of Exclusion

Unlike the first generation of aged Armenian women who keep a "deep silence" about the *ferman* days, the second or third generation, especially the Syriac Jazirans whose elders comprised the early refugees in the French Jazira, overtly highlight this historical period. Regardless of the fact that the starting point of my interviews was either on the history of the border or the French mandate period, the *ferman* days form the starting point and the plot of their historical narratives regarding either of my enquiries. Whether my Christian interviewees were Syriac, Assyrian, Chaldean, or (more rarely) Armenians, and whether our meeting came about by chance or by appointment, and wherever it took place whether in a casual or formal setting, they immediately began by telling about "their" real life stories of the violent persecutions in the *old days*, i.e. the *ferman* days. Extremely detailed narratives of flight and struggle for survival on the *way* to Syria characterized their narratives of the *ferman*. As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, these long stories about the *ferman* days are always concluded by an *assuring* arrival in Syria. As well as this, the *ferman* represents a sudden and unexpected collapse of the old and by-definition "good" way of life. The narrative techniques varied according to generation, gender, and class but the plot was the same: narratives of violence and loss "there" at home which is followed by safety "here" in Syria.

Trauma studies analyze the ways in which the traumatic memory resists integration or dissolution, thus remains un-integrated into the linear understanding of time—as can be seen in the above-quoted example of the Armenian who became frightened when he witnessed the Feast of Sacrifice in Qamishli.[372] When the profoundness of the violence experienced by the Armenians and other Christians (as well as the Kurds, though in a different way) is taken into consideration, it is understandable that the traumatic memories of the *ferman* resist integration. As well as being the main reason for their flight to the French Jazira, along with the extreme poverty prevailing on the Turkish side, it marks a new beginning of a new life in a new socio-political and economic context. Moreover, being the "unacknowledged" victims of the Turkish nationalist venture, and given the absence of any space for the Jazirans' narratives to be recognized in Turkey either at an individual or a communal level, they had the urge to manifest their stories in front of me, a Turkish woman in Syria.

However, as demonstrated in the previous section, the modes of remembering the *massacres* are peculiar. The *ferman* memories of the Jaziran Syriacs in particular were comparable to a long story of *escape* (from slaughter). Anecdotes of "Christian resistance" to the "Muslim surrender" of a village or a church accompanied the escape scenes. Escape was always construed as something contingent and hazardous. Distrust of the Turks (Muslims), and the inherent unreliability/unfaithfulness brought forward the likelihood of slaughter and the likelihood of survival at the same time. "That the Turks are unreliable but only go after their interests" and "that the Turks don't have mercy (Kur: *rehmet*) in their hearts" or the "Muslims are heartless" (*ma 'andun dhamir*) are some of the expressions that I have heard continuously from the Jaziran Armenians and Kurds, and less so from the Syriacs.

In this section, I attempt to approach the issue from the reverse and ask the following questions: In which ways does the setting in present-day Syria trigger such memories of the *ferman* and how do the memories of the *ferman* structure their everyday experiences today? What kind of historical parallels are redrawn between the past conflicts and the present anxieties?

The notion of the "space of death" suggested by Taussig in his book *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man* offers a useful conceptual tool to understand the presentist

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[372] Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimony: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

implications of the *ferman* violence in Syrian Jazira. According to Taussig, the death space is "produced as a result of social relations of terror … in contradiction to places of healing."[373]

> It is one of contradictions, of life and death, of chaos that lies beneath order, of illumination and obscurity of reason, of hope and despair. It is a space ruled by terror of the certainty of death as an imminent possibility yet the uncertainty of when, how and if it is even really going to happen. Terror in the space of death is not the result of the functional need of conquest, but rather is originated in the culture of evil as opposed to the space of God's order.[374]

Sasanka Perara introduces the notion of the "shadow of death" in her work on Sri Lanka—indeed, this is perhaps a more relevant notion in application to the Syrian case.[375] The "space of death" refers "to a dark space in that journey or path, a space that once one has entered, one may or may not leave, and thus the shadow of death has an element of uncertainty."[376]

The notion is employed for those societies where torture is endemic and the culture of terror flourishes, and where the victims of the terror try to cope with the "ruins of memory" under the same political rule as the perpetrators of the violence. Perara argues that

> Clearly, its outcome or persistence is the source of that uncertainty, an uncertainty that realizes the existential predicament of masses of societies under terror. Until one enters it and experiences it, one cannot be sure if the shadow of death will be a terminal stage for him, a stage in which he will cease to exist; even when he has experienced it, until the very last moment he cannot be sure of the continuity of life beyond the shadow of death. It is this uncertainty in the shadow of death which mystifies and horrifies. Even when death appears certain, the form it will take … remains ever uncertain.[377]

However, both the political and the socio-economic contexts that reproduce the above-mentioned uncertainty and fear in the post-colonial contexts such as Sri Lanka, Guatemala, post-partition India, pre-apartheid South Africa, or even today's Iraq and pre-Taif Lebanon, which form the main fields of the studies on violence and subjectivity, are rather different than Syria, which is depicted a "place of healing" according to my Christian informants, if not

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[373] Gastón Gordillo, *Landscapes of Devils: Tensions of Place and Memory in the Argentinean Chaco* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
[374] Ibid.
[375] Sasanka Perera, "Spirit Possessions and Avenging Ghosts, Stories of Supernatural Activity as Narratives of Terror and Mechanism of Coping and Remembering" in Veena Das *et. al.* (eds.), *Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering and Recovery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 157-200.
[376] Ibid.
[377] Ibid., p. 164.

disturbed by some degree of civilizational clash. Moreover, the victims of terror in the former cases continue to live in their "homes," though internally displaced, either under the same political regime or after a radical regime change. So how could these cases provide insights into the Syrian case? How would the notions of fear, distrust, and uncertainty appear as useful conceptual tools to better analyze the workings of the Jaziran Christians' memory of the *ferman*?

Below I propose to fine-tune the "space and shadow of death" arguments. I contend that in Syrian Jazira, the shadow of death evoked by the memories of the *ferman* appears as soon as there is uncertainty, uneasiness, and discomfort in *present-day* Jazira. In other words, today's uncertainty in Syria recalls the shadow of death of the *ferman*. Present discomfort in Syria, then, becomes entangled with the memories of 1915; or, the memories of the *ferman* become grafted onto a contemporary event.

Within the unacknowledged sectarian tension in Syria, which is to a certain extent intertwined with the unresolved debates dating from the French mandate period, the *ferman* violence has become what Assmann calls "stable objectification," that is "commemorative forms which transcend actual experience or withstand the fluidity of history."[378] Indeed, the past (the *ferman*) has turned into a template in order to interpret the present problems, and this, as I will show below, is a contradictory act as far as the official Syrian discourse and the Christians' political stance are concerned. As one of my informants, a middle-aged Syriac of Mardin origin, residing in Damascus and a senior member of the Syrian communist party, told me:

> Sect is the memory of the people [*mazhab huwa zikriyat al-bashar*]. Since the time the number of Kurds began increasing, the Christians have recalled the days of the *ferman* and the relationship between the Kurds and the Christians worsened. During the Lebanese civil war, it was due to the working of the historical memory [*al-zakira al-tarikhiyya*] that the Syriacs slaughtered the Muslims. Similarly, during the Kurdish incidents (*ahdas*) in Qamishli in 2004, the Christians remembered the old *ferman* days; they feared and escaped to their homes and neighbourhoods.

Nevertheless, this anxiety was never directly articulated; on the contrary it was always clothed with the rhetoric of communal harmony and balance, in accordance with the Syrian official ideology. It is extremely common especially among the Syriacs' narratives to emphasise that there is no ethno-religious discrimination and hierarchy in Syria and that there

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[378] Jan Assmann, "Five Steps of Canonization: Tradition, Scripture and the Origin of the Hebrew Bible," in Angelika Neuwirth and Andreas Pflitsch (eds.), *Crisis and Memory in Islamic Societies* (Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg in Kommission, 2001), pp. 75-93.

has never been one. Mutual trade relations between the Kurds and the Christians of Amouda and Qal'at Mar'a in Mardin is the generic example recited by the Jaziran Syriac elites to confirm the inter-religious harmony and interaction, two traits which are highly praised in Syrian official ideology. The quotation below, however, comes from a close relative of Sa'id Ishaq, who was an important advocate of the Autonomy Movement in Jazira (1936-39) and later a member of the Syrian parliament. This relative lived in California, US for many years and after his return was a candidate in the municipality elections in Qamishli (though he failed to be elected).

> In Amouda, people used to call Sa'id Ishaq "Mohammad Ishaq," because of his good relationship with the Muslims. Because of trade and upbringing, my parents appreciated the difference. Because during the *seferberlik*, the Kurds protected them from the Turks for six months. They are still friends with them. Sa'id Ishaq never visited Turkey, he never wanted to. He just wanted to see Mardin from afar, which is why he bought land in Amouda. [379]

To what effect, then, do I interpret my informants' emphasis on remembering the violence of *ferman* in a presentist way? On which grounds do I argue that the memories of violence are displaced onto today's discomfort and translated into the present? How do I justify my assumption that there is an increasing discomfort among the Christians of Jazira and communal segregation between them and the Kurds of Jazira? In what ways and in which settings is the communal segregation revealed?

The role of the present-day discomfort in Syrian Jazira and the ways in which it is layered upon the memories of the *ferman* and implicated in the particular ways of remembering it struck me during my fieldwork in Qamishli in two different ways: first, in nearly all the conversations about the history of their arrival in Syria, a deep anxiety and insecurity about the future was evoked, especially in the descriptions of the communal relations in the past; and second, in the constant comparison to the "other"—namely, the Kurds—in the narratives of those interviewees informed by the Armenian and Syriac establishment discourse.

The *ferman* violence, remembered and translated into the present, appeared in response to my controversial questions through which I aimed to see the limits of the state-sponsored rhetoric of harmony and to unveil the informally-proclaimed communal rules of conduct regarding the Other. These communal rules are very concrete daily realities in

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[379] Ishaq, interview with the author, May 2006, Damascus Syria.

Qamishli, revealed for example in the residential segregation in the city on an ethno-religious basis, in the reasons for Christian migration to Europe, and in the Kurdish uprisings there in 2004 The response, below, of a middle-aged woman from an ex-elite family reveals how the *ferman* has turned into a "stable objectification" articulated through a present-day discourse of agony.

> Why do we live in isolated and fragmented neighbourhoods … It has always been the case, since the beginning because we don't share the same culture with them; we are more Western and more open-minded than they are. Our language is also different … But actually, it is not us, but them who made the very choice of residing in secluded neighbourhoods, because they were afraid that we could take revenge as they are the perpetrators in the killings. They slaughtered us and then they seized our properties.[380]

As displayed in the above quotation, the idiom of supremacist gendered modernity is one which is deployed frequently by the middle-class Christians in their relation to the Other. The contrast between the Christians' inherent affinity towards modern Western values such as progress, education and order, and the Kurds' backwardness and conservative stance, especially in terms of "their women," is commonly employed by the Christians to differentiate themselves from the Kurds. All sorts of cultural, social, and economic markers are employed in order to prove the difference and dissimilarity of Syriacs from the Kurds. The Syriac is described as the counter-image of the ignorant, poor, fanatic, and inherently violent Kurd. As well as this, an ahistorical continuity is attributed to both communities, as if they have always been as they are in the present. An all-encompassing dissimilarity becomes the defining aspect of the relation between the two groups. The otherwise fragmented community is rendered coherent through the stigmatization of the Other, and moreover a moral superiority from this alleged difference is derived. Residential segregation was justified again through a culturalist discourse emphasizing the civilizational difference between the Christians and the Muslims. That "their women wear short sleeves and the women do not feel comfortable in the same neighbourhood with the Muslim veiled women while the Muslim men are watching them"; "That the Kurds have extended families, while the Christians have smaller families, with fewer children, so that the latter can spare her time to the education of the children or the good of the family unlike the ignorant Kurdish women and the Kurdish

[380] Cemile, interview with the author, May 2005, Qamishli, Syria.

men looking for self-enjoyment"—these are some of the topoi used to describe the Christians' dissimilarity from the Kurds.

My conversations as well as the survivor memoirs written by survivers, though rare, indicate that it is usually when the "order" is disrupted (on a smaller or larger scale) by an *external* impulse which has the potential of inserting a form of tension in the present that the "shadow of death" or the "memories of violence" arise to cover the whole story. At those times, the present and the future become obscured by the past.[381] As long as the present flows in an "orderly" way, the memories of the "reign of terror" or the motif of genocide seems to be outside the plot of their narratives. However, any sign of threat in the present invites the memories of the genocide which in turn burn out the present in the past memories of violence. This becomes more concrete in the quite reflexive account of the director of the Armenian Protestant school, Melkun Melkun:

> We are from Mardin, the city centre. I am the religious leader of the protestant Syriac community here, but originally we are Armenians and converted into Protestantism rather late. Up until now we consider ourselves as Armenians, we feel as Armenians. I grew up with the feeling of fear and feeling of alertness to all possible threats. In our imagination, there, behind the mountains of Nusaybin, there are Turks with a *khanjar* in their hands waiting to appear anytime at a moment of slightest problem. We immediately recall the days of the *seferberlik* and suffering and slaughtering when there is an instability vis-à-vis the Muslims here.[382]

As mentioned in the Introduction, there are rather few critical studies on the Christians in the Levant. Most of the scholarly studies on the intercommunal relations and state-community relations in the Middle East usually share the basic presuppositions of the orientalist mosaic society model where the (Christian) community is assumed to represent the repressed and the silenced under the yoke of the (Muslim) majority/state. As far as the memory literature in Turkey is concerned, it adopts a socially constructivist perspective and emphasizes the ways in which the hegemonic Turkish nationalist ideology leaves no room for the memory of the Other.[383]

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[381] For an elaborate discussion of the survivor memoires written in English for the American audience, see Cihan Tuğal, "Memories of Violence, Memoirs of Nation: 1915 and the Construction of Armenian Identity," in Esra Özyürek (ed.) *The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), pp. 138-161.

[382] Melkun Melkun, interview with the author, May 2005, Qamishli, Syria.

[383] Meltem Ahıska, "Occidentalism and Registers of Truth: Politics of Archives in Turkey," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 34, 2006, Special Issue on Social Memory, pp. 9-30. Biray Kolluoğlu Kırlı, "Forgetting the Smyrna Fire," *History Workshop Journal*, 60, 2005: 25-44; Esra Özyürek (ed.) *The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007); Leyla Neyzi, "Recollection as a Contribution to Reconciliation:

The Syrian case, however, does not fit either model. Unlike the Turkish case, the Syrian Armenians' or the Syriacs' memories of the World War I massacres or the ensuing Turkish state terror in the early Republican period are not silenced or suppressed in an absolute sense by the Syrian official ideology. On the contrary, their historical narratives about World War I are accommodated by the Syrian official ideology. Unlike some of their co-religionists in Turkey, Jaziran Christians do not embrace a pro-minority discourse or claim that they are threatened and oppressed under the Muslim domination in Syria. As mentioned above, the Jaziran Kurds forget or at least blur the 1915 events and the Kurdish involvement, not due to the dictates of the official Arab nationalism, but on the contrary in a relation of subordination and antagonism to the repressive Ba'th rule. The Jaziran reality does not fit the Lebanese model, either, where a sectarian understanding of religious identity is overtly highlighted both in public and private spheres.

In the absence of critical studies on Syria, debates on popular memory, national past, and hegemony, especially in other Third World settings, helped me to readjust the "space of death" argument in a more presentist way. Ted Swedenburg's study on Palestinian popular memory was especially inspiring for me. Inspired by Gramsci and critical theory, he demonstrates how current dominant apparatuses (Israel's colonial machinery and the Palestinian national government in Swedenburg's case) reshape history in order to coerce and/or incorporate the subaltern memories, and how the official discourses shape the subaltern memories both by establishing acceptable forms and disqualifying the alternative forms. This process, argues Gramsci, must appeal to people in order to gain their consent and exercise political control/hegemony, through a combination of persuasion and force. However, one should be careful not to make an absolute distinction between recollections on the individual level and official truths. As Chalcraft and Noorani point out, a radical distinction between hidden and public culture ignores the forms of power at work in intimate settings, as well as the overlaps between the two categories.[384] Subaltern memory is not ready, "out there," waiting to be extracted by the researcher in a space untouched by the dominant

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Turkish-Armenian Project" in Matthias Klinberg and Elena Sabirova, (eds). *Processing History, Contemporary Witnesses and Reconciliation Work* (Bonn: dvv International, 2010).

[384] John Chalcraft and Yaseen Noorani (eds.), *Counterhegemony in the Colony and Postcolony* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 8.

interpretations; instead, as Swedenburg argues "the public past is one of the ideological forms through which the masses live their condition of subalternity."[385]

In this manner, I was able to grasp one of the present dynamics of remembering, explicitly divulging, publicly circulating, and memorializing the dreadful memories of *ferman* violence which overrides its quality of being just a significant juncture in the course of history. In Syrian Jazira, the *ferman* is depicted as only a *stage* in the course of history, a *zeitgeist*, a *past* event, as a "frozen slide" *back* in Turkey.[386] It is construed as a "defunct-history" which has already passed by and indeed been consumed. The Jaziran Christians who talk freely about the brutal past are cautious enough to confirm that what they are describing is indeed *bygone* in Syria, where the underlying factors or the symptoms that led to the "outburst" seventy to ninety years ago are no longer present in their "reassured" lives in Syria. However, they either maintain a deep silence or present culturalist arguments when it comes to answering to my enquiries about the reason for the increasing residential segregation between the Kurds and the rest of the population in the city.

So, the *seferberlik*/*ferman* comes to resemble a code word, evoking layers of psychologically intense and politically resonant meanings. The remainder of this section is concerned with this dynamic through which two interrelated themes are revealed: the systems of power and domination in Syria in which the subaltern memory is embedded and through which it is mediated; and the particular ways in which the tensions and anxieties in present-day Jazira are contained by grafting them onto a past event and entangling this with the "accepted" memories of 1915, and writing the whole history of the community into the (a)history of religious violence.

Drawing from Jonathan Culler, Edward Bruner conveys that "the present is given meaning in terms of that anticipated present we call the future and the former present which we call the past."[387] Similarly, what the Jaziran Christians are undertaking through their two-layered narrative is that they protect and secure the present from the officially outlawed-sectarianism, political discrimination, and communal hostility that the memories of the past, namely the *ferman*, evoke and imply. They remove the fear and insecurity evoked by the memories of *ferman* from the present by displacing it onto their pre-Syrian lives. Blocking the

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[385] Ted Swedenburg, "Popular Memory and the Palestinian National Past," in Jay O'Brien and William Roseberry (ed.), *Golden Ages, Dark Ages: Imagining the Past in Anthropology and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1991), p. 156.
[386] I borrow the expression "frozen slide" from Veena Das. Veena Das, *Life and words: violence and the descent into the ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. 11.
[387] Victor Turner and Edward Bruner, *The Anthropology of Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 142.

association between the past and the present, disconnecting the memories of the *ferman* from the present-day reality in Syria in an absolute way, suggests that violence and communal hostility is indeed an exclusive parcel of history which has nothing to do with today's reality in Ba'th Syria and that the present regime is devoid of the kind of (sectarian) violence that the memories of *ferman* bring to the fore. They refrain from "bedaubing" the present with the communal hostility and resulting anxiety that the violence-centred narrative of the *ferman* suggests. In other words, the victims of the *ferman*, through calling attention to the violence of the *ferman* days, try to externalize the violence in the present—in other words, to silence the tension within and between the communities and thereby endorse a peaceful and tranquil understanding of Armenian/Syriac community in today's Syria, in accordance with the offcial discourse. The words of a middle-class Armenian in Qamishli who is a member of the Armenian *majlis al-milli* (the council of a state recognised sect) is a proof of this argument. He stated the following by way of explanation for not giving me a proper appointment to talk about the Armenians in Jazira today.

> Here we only have stories to tell, whereas in Turkey there were problems and slaughter.

So, the present situation of state–community relations appears in the silences and gaps, through either ignoring the aspect of conflict in social and political relations in Syrian Jazira or articulating them in culturalist terms.

Compared with the Syriacs in Turkey, who have been exposed to continuous assimilation and domination under the Turkish state, the Jaziran Syriacs and Armenians have enjoyed a "salvation phase" and the "religious privileges" which materially enabled them to effect a *disjuncture* of the past from the present. While for the Syriacs in Turkey, the distance of the past from the present was not important or always the same,[388] the past is definitely distinct from the present for their Syrian coreligionists. Thanks to their relatively privileged status in Jazira (unlike the Kurds), they are able to label the present with harmonious coexistence and write the history of the pre-Syrian past into violence. The discourse of harmony and social accord—namely, of various religious groups living next to each other in peace—predominates in the public discourse, particularly among the elites of the Christian establishment. The Kurds, neither their economic elites nor their intellectuals, are preoccupied

[388] Heidemarie Armbruster, *Securing the Faith*, p.74.

with the harmony discourse. To argue that religious discrimination is a phenomenon that has no validity in Syria today is an ideological statement in itself and in accordance with the Syrian official Arab nationalist ideology as mentioned above. The fact that public ethno-religious identification is taboo and is "un-built" in the Syrian political discourse plays a tremendous role in the cautiousness of the Jaziran Christians not to 'contaminate' the present with the religious atrocities of the past. The relative stability and peace in communal relations in Syria compared to all of its neighbouring states without exception—most notably Turkey, Lebanon, and Iraq—certainly justify their claim.

This anxiety has economic and political underpinnings in present-day Syria. The economic aspect is revealed in the bitter and brief remarks that follow the above supremacist statements and mentions of the material and cultural embourgeoisement of the Kurds. As mentioned above, displacing the state's role in the massacres of the Kurds as a whole and blaming them for the deprivation of the Syriacs and ruining of their livelihood in the past relate to the present anxieties of the Christians arising from the disempowerment of especially the Syriac community vis-à-vis the Kurdish community and the political and social rivalry between them. Significantly enough, such a Christian particularism and claims of superiority are employed not by the upper-class Christians for instance in Aleppo, but more often by the *ex*-well-to-dos and urban lower-class Syriacs.

Regarding the political aspect of the anxiety of mixing, the terms of difference and its justifications are in conformity with the terms of the unequal communitarian system in Syria and its political implications. The Syrian state closely monitors the communities and borders between the communities so as to prevent the formation of a common oppositionary political space crosscutting ethnicities and religions. Their self-representation as one of the religious communities (*ta'ifa*) among several others in Syria, and (deliberate) misrepresentation of the Kurdish community's presence in Jazira, justifies and complies with the ethno-politics of the Syrian state, in particular with its stance vis-à-vis the Kurdish problem.

Thus, I argue that these identity markers employed by the Christians refer to an "idiom" with which to project/cast their aspirations and will to power, as well as to negotiate relations of power in the local and national environment. The middle-class supremacist language of the Christians refers to claims to upward mobility, while implicitly knowing that "the good old days when Qamishli used to be the petite-Paris" are already over—since they are outnumbered by Kurds and are starting to lose their hegemonic position. Therefore, the supremacist rhetoric also implies a defensive urge to contend, but not to openly debate, contemporary issues.

Chapter III Obscuring the Colony and Overstating the Colonized: Christians' and Kurds' Memories of the Early French Mandate Rule in the French Jazira

After one his several trips in the French Jazira, the former head of the French intelligence services in Jazira (*Service de Renseignements*), Louis Dillemann, stated:

> it seems rather rare to come across to a place name which seems to have an ancient origin. The same impersonal labels characterize the local toponymy here. These place names exist in all three different languages (Turkish, Arabic and Kurdish) and are based on describing the exterior character of these places. They are very typical of a new group of people naming a new place upon their immediate arrival. From Nusaybin, one has to go as far as Sinjar before one finds another name that already was employed by the… the old inhabitants of the region. If we want to make a list of place names that have survived from the antiquity up to the present, the list would not grow much longer after Babel, Sirwan and Amouda. However one usually comes across the term "*kharab*" in Arabic [En: desolate, ruined] employed for the newly-built villages today.[389]

This observation is rather telling about the Jaziran land and its recently arrived peoples: it shows us both that the land is "new," and also, as the prefix *kharab* suggests, that the new refuge is not treated totally as an uncanny place but can be related to at a certain level. In this sense, the prefix *kharab* also reveals the character of the "past" that the newcomer Kurds, Armenians and Syriacs relate to and have carried with them to the French Jazira.

This chapter is about the memories of their early arrival and starting a new life in the French Jazira. I will adopt a critical perspective towards the (post) memories and analyze the ways in which the Syriacs, Armenians and Kurds in Jazira re-member a coherent, self-evident "community" enjoying full agency, through (mis)remembering or forgetting the French colonial period. I will draw attention to the political implications of the particular ways in which the concept of community/nation is reified in the historical narratives. Like the previous chapters, this chapter will open with a long historical section which will serve to better contextualize the (post) memories. The historical section also aims to fill in the blind spots of this under-studied and under-documented region during the early days of the French mandate. I will maintain a presentist perspective in my analysis of the memories; however, I will also shift the focus more onto the history of the early mandate period in Jazira, so as to be able to identify the socio-economic and political processes that paved the way to the emergence of a culture of sectarianism in the region that underlies the current social, cultural and political subjectivities in the Syrian Jazira.

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[389] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Syrie-Liban, Box 550, Louis Dillemann "Etude de développement économique du basin Superior de Djagh Djagh depuis l'occupation Française (1926-1931)", October 1931, p. 10 and 11.

In the previous chapter, I contended that remembering pre-Syrian life, in particular the 1915 violence, unites the otherwise fractured Christian communities in the Syrian Jazira. As far as mainstream Armenian nationalist discourse—which is widely shared by the Syrian-Armenians—is concerned, the 1915 genocide has a unique status as the main reference point in the history of the community. It signifies a radical *break* with the past, a historical moment which devastated the people and ruined the sense of "community." Nonetheless, by referring persistently to the 1915 violence and describing the violence in a particular way, the personal gains a collective (communal/nationalist) meaning. In other words, remembering the 1915 violence becomes the core of the Armenian community. The Syriac nationalist narrative—shared among the majority of the Syriacs in Jazira—dwells on the massacres, poverty and oppression that *preceded* their arrival in Syria. However, the "Syrian state flavour" is more distinguishable in this communal discourse: accordingly, the massacres in Turkey are described as yet another face of a full-fledged encounter between the Muslim-Kurds and the (Syriac) Christians that has been ongoing throughout history. Unlike the Syriacs and Armenians, the self-image expressed in Kurdish nationalist discourse is one of a community subject to *continuous* state violence, which commenced with the 1925 Sheikh Said Revolt in Turkey and has endured under the post-colonial Arab nationalist regimes. In this view, the 1915 Armenian genocide, in which some of the Kurdish tribes of the region were complicit, is usually silenced. Where the cooperation between some Kurdish tribes and the Ottoman/Turkish authorities is mentioned, these cases are usually conceptualized as disjunctive and discrete historical incidents which have no relevance to present-day inter-communal relations or the history of the Kurds in Syria or as "the acts of some self-interest-seeking aghas" Instead, it is the Kurds' sacrifice, and the protection they granted to the "Christian victims of the Turkish state violence," that is written into Kurdish nationalist history and memories. It may be argued, then, that the socio-cultural implications of the present-day Syrian state's official politics of difference and anti-Kurdish discrimination in Syria are strongly implied in the historical narratives about their pre-Syrian lives.

The narratives of arrival and settlement in the French Jazira do not command the same length and level of detail as do the memories of the *ferman*. This is notable with respect to the memories of the Christians of Jazira, if not those of the Kurds. In the narratives of the second generation middle-class Jaziran-Christians in particular, the violent episode in the Ottoman Empire/Turkey is followed by a period of relief in the Syrian Jazira. The new life in Jazira represents a positive change: from insecurity, fear, instability and oppression, to security, stability and freedom. Unlike the memories of the *ferman*—which are usually articulated

through the discourse of agony and difference from the Other (the Turks and/or the Kurds)—the Syrian phase of their lives, the early mandate period in particular, evokes security and tolerance. In contrast to the *ferman* memories, security (*aman*) and peace (*salam*) were the most common labels employed, especially by my Christian interviewees, to characterize the French mandate period *and* the post-colonial Syrian Arab regimes. For the Kurds, too, the mandate period per se evokes (relative) peace and freedom, although not ease. However, it is at best conceived as a "break" in a long history of ethnic oppression. It is depicted as an interlude of (relative) freedom between two oppressive regimes, that of the Turks and that of the post-colonial Arab regimes, and a time in which everyday forms of life could resume—albeit marked by the hardships of starting afresh.[390]

There is almost no critical scholarly work in Arabic, Kurdish, Armenian or Syriac concerning the relation between the newcomer refugees (*muhajirun*) and the local population in the early days of French colonial rule in Syria.[391] Studies on the Jazirans' early arrival are even scarcer, as the newcomer Christian groups form the most marginalized sections of their respective communities in social, economic and cultural terms. Most of the writing on the newcomers' lives in Syria is penned rather late—in the late 1980s—and is mostly by Syriac writers. These studies usually focus on the pre-modern history of the region from a sectarian or nationalist perspective. The colonial phase is blurred in these narratives. Kurdish intellectuals, though fewer in number, follow the Syriac writers and try to counter the Arab-centric and Syriac-centric accounts about the region, its history and its peoples, which are produced by the official Ba'th-Arab nationalist and the Assyrian/Syriac nationalist writers.

Regardless of the writers'/conveyors' socioeconomic and ethno-religious or political standing, historical narratives about the early days of the mandate period address two actors: the French and the Arabs. The French—obviously—symbolize the colonial rule that is now a distant past. Yet the meaning of the term "Arab," as referred to in the narratives, is sensitive

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[390] The notion of freedom should be nuanced at this point. See Hamit Bozarslan for the Kurdish case; for the Syrian case, Abdallah Hanna, "Pour ou Contre le mandat Français", in Nadine Méouchy, *France, Syrie et Liban, 1918-1946 Les Ambiguités et les Dynamiques* (Damascus: IFEAD, 2002), p. 186. The notion of freedom in the memories of especially the first generation of Kurdish refugees in Jazira may be comparable to Hanna's findings among the Arab peasants of eastern Syria—that it is not the presence of a modern nation state that is implied by freedom, but the relative absence of modern state structures. (This aspect is more obvious in the memories of the border.)

[391] Several works on Syria mention the bad conditions and the bad treatment of the refugees prior to their arrival, but only in by passing. Among the few critical works on the refugees are as follows: Keith Watenpaugh, *Being Modern*; idem, "Towards a New Category of Colonial Theory: Colonial Cooperation and the *Survivors' Bargain*—The Case of the Post-Genocide Armenian Community of Syria under French Mandate", in Peter Sluglett and Nadine Méouchy (eds.), *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 597-622; Ellen Marie Lust-Okar, "Failure of Collaboration: Armenian Refugees in Syria", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32,1 (1996), pp. 53-68.

to context. It constantly moves between two different time zones: between the "Arab" as a political actor in 1930s and Arab tribes encountered upon arrival in the French Jazira; and the present-day Syrian regime and the Sunni-Arabs forming the majority of the population in Syria today.

I argue that the difference between the historical narratives of the Kurds and the Christians stems from the different subject positions of the Christians and the Kurds vis-à-vis the "Arab" and vice versa. In other words, the difference is indeed a translation into the cultural/social field of the present-day political inequality under Ba'th-Arab nationalist rule. Evidently, the Christians compare the French mandate period with their "undesirable status" in their home *back* in Turkey, whereas the Kurds compare it with their *present* "undesirable status" *here* in the Syria of the present.[392] In other words, state recognition of the Christians as a separate sect and the relatively peaceful state–community relations in the colonial and post-colonial periods, contrasted with the anti-Kurdish policies of the Ba'th state, are the main reasons underlying the difference in historical narratives. The rememberings through which the communities are reconstructed have also political implications. The sectarian narratives in the Christians' memories reflect and reinforce, yet rarely counter, the prevailing hegemonic order in Syria. This order grants the "white Christian" *relative* safety and protection in Syria under a repressive regime in which Islamist and Kurdish challenges are gaining ground.

The first part of this chapter will focus on the ways in which the historical narratives relate to the colonial past and to the "Arab."

(Post) Memories

Syriacs

In Syriacs' written and oral accounts, the French agency in the realization of the migrations to the French Jazira and its role in the later social and economic development of

[392] Elizabeth Picard points out the role of the collective memory of the massacres between 1840 and 1860 on the "security and freedom" demands of the Lebanese Christians. See Elizabeth Picard, "Dynamics of the Lebanese Christians: From the Paradigm of the 'āmmiyyāt to the paradigm of the Hwayyek", in Andrea Pacini (ed.), *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East: The Challenge of the Future* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 203. Leila Tarazi Fawaz also refers to the process of accumulation of memories of antagonism; see Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *An Occasion for War, Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860* (London: IB Tauris, 1944), p. 30, p. 218.

the region are generally conceded, but not normally acknowledged in full. Colonial rule is almost always expurgated from its social and political acts and implications in the local space.

It is not that the French rule or the Turkish state is never mentioned; rather, they are transformed into non-subjects with no real agency. Obscuration of colonial French agency in the Christian "success story" is accompanied by praise of the "Arabs" for their generous hospitality upon the Christians' arrival.

While the memories are more fractured, less coherent, and incorporate bits and pieces from contradictory discourses, the written works are keener to maintain the ficton of the French as non-subjects. Indeed, a critical analysis of the (recent) publications by Syriac writers on the post-genocide period in Syria should focus on the missing words, the null-subjects and passive agents in the written narratives. The sentences are very often in passive tense and give only brief coverage of social, economic and political life in Jazira during the French mandate period. "Migration" (*hicra*) is used, rather than "deportation" (*tahcir*), to describe the act of leaving Turkey; "French rule" in the region is silenced and replaced with the "Syrian government."[393] The French Jazira epoch, with its social, political and economic transformations, is almost forgotten. Christians' narratives of displacement from Turkey and arrival are insulated from contradictions and hardships. French agency in facilitating the arrival of the newcomers and as one of the fundamental factors in the recovery of the community is replaced by the Arabs and the Syrian government. In the published works, the generous welcome afforded to the newcomer Christians by the Arabs and the Syrian government upon their arrival to the Syrian Jazira is placed at the centre of the narrative. Jozef Asmar's book, entitled *Min Nisaybin ila Zaliyan (al-qamishli)* (From Nisibin to Zalin (Qamishli)) opens with a very brief description of Jazira upon the Syriacs' arrival and describes the transformation of Qamishli in parallel with the revitalization of the "historical Syriac community" under the "auspices of Arab rule."[394]

However, the memories are not always unilinear and consistent; history is not hegemonic. Unlike the published works in which French agency is to a large extent silenced and transferred to the Syrian Arab nationalists, the rememberings, in particular those of the middle class Christians', acknowledge the French agency but *depoliticize* it by confining the French presence to the cultural sphere. The colonial French agency is culturalized and its "civilizing mission" is singled out as the sole form of French presence in Syria—similar, in fact, to the

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[393] Ukin Boulis Munufer Barsoum, *Al-Suryan fi al-qamishli, bayn al-madi al-talid wa la-hadir al-majid* [Syriacs in Qamishli: Between the Ancient Past and the Glorious Present] (Qamishli: n.p., 1982), p. 34.
[394] Jozef Asmar Malki, *Min Nisibin ila Zalin*, Introduction.

way that the colonizers themselves legitimized their colonial rule in Syria. France enters into the narrative through its introduction of the "superior western civilization." In other words, the social and political agency of the colonizer is expurgated and replaced with its cultural undertakings. In the memories of middle-class Jaziran Syriacs, a culturalist modernist discourse is employed to describe French rule. Modernist eurocentrism is indeed a peculiar characteristic of the historical narratives by the middle-classes in general. It is through the same discourse that the local Christianity defines and distinguishes itself from the Other, the Muslim or the Kurd.

The Christian lower classes, or Christians originally from rural backgrounds, however, build their narratives on the sorrow, poverty and hardship of the early days of arrival. Still, the narratives of adversity are articulated through a discourse of progress and recovery. The Syriac-Christians in general, or the middle-class Jaziran Syriacs in particular, are assumed to take over and possess these superior western qualities, while the rest, the Kurds in the Jaziran context, or the Muslims in other Syrian contexts, are assumed to be devoid of these middle-class western traits. Within this social hierarchy, modern, middle-class, western cultural traits draw the boundaries of belonging to the Christian community and become the distinctive markers of Syriacness. This discourse of difference/superiority articulated in culturalist terms is similar to the one that appeared in the memories of *ferman*. It reveals and reproduces the underlying political, social and cultural inequalities between the Kurds and the Syriacs in present-day Syria. An educated middle-class man who is involved in Assyrian nationalist activities in Qamishli states:

> The French brought progress, civilization, order and science. They civilized the people and ordered our lives through hygiene, alimentation, science, education, manners, dress and so on … . They brought security. We learned how to eat, how to drink … . French rule wasn't like the Ottoman occupation; they were trying to modernize the country. We escaped from Muslim oppression and found refugee here. The freedom during the French times was an unthinkable thing for us.
>
> Our families were sentimentally attached to the French, but they also divided our community, as Catholics and Orthodox.[395]

The colonial agency is obscured mostly when it comes to controversial periods, and issues concerning the community's engagement—and in particular some Christians' conformity or complicity—with colonial rule. This reveals another peculiarity of both the (post) memories and the published work: there is hardly any mention of controversial issues from the past or

[395] Isho, interview with the author, May 2006, Dirbessiyye, Syria.

present. The lament and discomfort upon arrival, or the conflict and enmity between the refugees and the Syrian Arab nationalists, are usually silenced as historical traces regardless of their origins and manifestations, be it economic, social or otherwise. As will be demonstrated in the coming sections, despite the fact that the newspapers of the 1930s were full of articles concerning the social and political controversy about and in Jazira, any mention of politics or social change is strictly abstained from in the oral and written narratives of the later years. Instead, in the rememberings, the "cursed life" in the homeland is followed by the unequivocally positive one in Syria.[396]

It is actually the tacit agreement reached between the Syrian ruling elite and the Christian community establishments in the mid 1930s that the (post) memories refer to as the beginning and the end point of the history of the Syriac/Armenian community. The mid 1930s witnessed the transformation of the anti-refugee discourse of 1920s into a politically more inclusive discourse about refugees that can be formulated as 'good refugees" vs. "bad refugees'. It is this opening in the 1930s, followed by the ideological dominance of the Arab nationalist ideology in the post-colonial period that silenced the 'complications of the delivery' and silenced the controversial period that the refugee groups experienced upon their arrival in the French Jazira. Unequal communal rights under an authoritarian political regime in the post-colonial period, combined with the economic, social and demographic deprivation of the Christian groups that had been on the increase for the last two decades, nourished the nostalgic memories and accentuated the pre-Syria vs. post-Syria dichotomy.

Keith Watenpaugh, in his article about the relation between the Armenian community in Aleppo and the French colonial state, warns the reader against "fetishization of resistance" concerning the relationship between the colonized (Syrian) and the colonizer (French). He argues that fetishization of resistance renders the "more common place acts of activity operating outside the structures of resistance at least historically uninteresting or irrelevant, and at most morally bankrupt or culturally inauthentic.[397] This analysis is true for the middle-class oral narratives in Jazira, but in a slightly different way—as will be explained in the coming section.

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[396] Imaginations of the refugees regarding the new refuge is an under-explored subject which stands in opposition to the abundance of studies on the representations of home. However, the temporality and discourses about the new refuge show commonalities particularly among the middle-class refugees in different contexts. Foe the US imagination of Armenian refugees in US see, Cihan Tuğal, "1915 Hatıraları ve Ermeni Kimliğinin İnşası".

[397] Watenpaugh, "Towards a New Category of Colonial Theory", p. 599.

I would argue that, in addition to resistance—which, compared to other colonial contexts, one seldom encounters in the history of anti-colonialism in Syria—two other markers of Syrian Arab nationalism inform the memories about the relationship between the refugees and Syrian society: namely, "unity" and "communal harmony." As mentioned in Chapter 1, the rejection of confessionalism was one of the four principles of Ba'th party ideology from the beginning,[398] where socially and culturally unifying trends were integrated into the official historiography as late as 1975.[399] The same official credentials which singled out the "collective suffering" aspect of World War I and blurred the more common dissident aspects are played out once again in the historiography of the early encounters of the refugees with the local Syrians. It is these two basic markers—Syrian Arab nationalist historiography, and the mainstream communalist/sectarian discourses that resonate with the official history—that have silenced the complex history of refugees in Syria and whitewashed its improper aspects.

The crux of the memories of the middle-class Syriacs and Armenians is informed by the state-sponsored discourse of harmony. Absence of discrimination is the most significant aspect of the post-genocide life narratives in Syria. Labelling Syria and the Syrian phase of their lives with perfect stability and harmony has two implications: minimizing the colonial agency as the protector of the Christians, and reifying the prevailing order in Syria. The quotation below by a woman of Mardin origin, from one of the ex-elite families of the French Jazira, exemplifies this perspective:

> The French did not protect us, because there was *no* war or *no* discrimination to be protected against. There was a peaceful coexistence at the time here in Syria. Indeed in the past, there was nothing here, we established it … . There was also no problem. The problems we face now are all recent problems and their origins are external.[400]

Still, it is not my intention to claim that discourse of 'regeneration of the community' in the French Syria, and an uncontextualized and ahistorical notion of harmony between religious groups, as revealed in the oral narratives are merely state-sponsored/fabricated propaganda material. Neither have I argued that it was pure conflict and animosity that defined the refugee–Arab relationship. What I contend is that the controversial encounter between the two groups in the early 1920s, during which both the borders of belonging to a (refugee) community and Syrianness itself were being negotiated, are overlooked in the oral narratives.

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[398] Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle For Power in Syria: Politics and Society Under Asad and the Ba'th Party* (London: IB Tauris, 1996), pp. 146-151.
[399] Ulrike Freitag, "Writing Arab History: The Search for the Nation", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 21 (1994), p. 33.
[400] Ibid.

As the early dissidence is excluded, so has the contested process of integration of the newcomers into the host society become an unaddressed issue. The imagined community came to embody all that is good, which renders it somewhat immune from criticism. In other words, an already-decolonized nationalist history resonates in the Christian-Jazirans' historical narratives. This is the main difference between the Jaziran case and Watenpaugh's argument, above, that Syrian nationalist history is conditioned to find "resistance" in history and thus undermines other forms of relationship. In Jaziran Christians' memories, history is presented as already "clean" in a self-made way without any process of negotiation or resistance. Jaziran narratives leave no room for tracking the confrontations and transformations in the political and social subjectivities.

After having said that a culturalized colonial agency and an abstract Arab presence are acknowledged in the memories, it is in the interest of the social scientist to understand how these mutually opposing actors coexist and are actually reconciled in the historical narratives of interviewees. I argue that it is in this very act of reconciliation that the distinguishing aspects of the memories and Jaziran-Christian subjectivity lie. In the oral narratives, neither the French nor the Arabs are ever portrayed as the absolute makers or the sole generators of the well-being of the Christians. It is the *community* itself which is depicted as the architect of its own success story. The contributions of neither of the two external agents are celebrated to the degree that the agency of the community is totally dissolved. The role granted to the community appears most evidently in the "labour effort spent for the flourishing and prosperity of the region." The words of a middle-class Syriac man are exemplary in this respect:

> There was nothing here in Qamishli … Nothing … . then *we* built up this city and the market; we built our own schools, churches, charities and so on … Not the French but *we*, the community [*al-taifa*] made them all. My grandpa used to make the sheep trade between Midyat [Turkey] and Mosul. He continued doing so following their arrival to Qamishli subsequent to his temporary stay in Mosul during the *seferberlik* days. (He was sentenced to capital punishment because of his resistance to the Turks.) He came here because it was close to his property in Midyat. Then he started making trade with Aleppo and gradually formed the market. Eventually he ended up owning two big neighbourhoods inside Qamishli, two hotels in the market, forty shops and four *khan*s. We only worked, just put in labour and bought the land from the French … . I am not sure but it's possible that the French distributed some land in the countryside to the notables of the city. The Syriacs in Mosul and Midyat, hearing about the development in the city, started migrating to here. My father was the director of the Syriac Orthodox elementary school during the French rule and became the city mayor after the French left until the unity between Egypt and Syria, an unfortunate event which turned everything upside down here.[401]

[401] Ciran, interview with the author, Qamishli, May 2005. [what is al-ciran: a pseudonym of an interviewee?

Singling out the communal agency in the making and flourishing of Jazira once again leads the local Christians to underestimate the pro-Christian political manoeuvres of the colonial power. By concealing the colonial agent and reclaiming agency from the colonizer, the Christians strive to de-colonize the "privileged colonial excesses" in their past. This can be viewed as a survival or empowerment strategy by the Syriac community vis-á-vis the post-colonial Arab regimes. The colonial representations and practices in Jazira that the Syriac memory tries to unmake form the topic of the next section.

The Syriac subjectivity does not only address the Arab nationalist regime through misremembering the colonial period, but in the meantime it speaks to other groups in Syria, in particular the Kurds, the most marginalized and oppressed section of the Syrian society. Thanks to the particular ways it relates to the Kurds, the Syriac establishment opens a politically conformist space in the Syrian public sphere and simultaneously empowers the community and its communalist/sectarian ideology. The memories relate to the Kurds through two different idioms: in nostalgic memories and in the narratives on the Jaziran land found upon arrival in the French Jazira.

Nostalgia is intrinsic to the historical narratives about the remaking of Jazira and the regeneration of the Syriac community in French-Syria. One can observe the nostalgic aspect when the above-mentioned discourse of harmony and stability is read together with the discourse of deterioration which usually accompanies it. Indeed, these two discourses are not only coexistent but mutually constitutive. Different articulations of the harmony and stability discourse have already been set out in the previous pages. The discourse of deterioration, however, refers to the disempowerment of the community following the colonial period, and to the socio-political empowerment of the Kurds over the last decade, all in a politically fragile country and region. It is revealed through different idioms, such as the "disruption of the old order" with the UAR rule, and/or "losing the majority" in present-day Syria.

> There was literally nothing here. Just four or five houses and the mills of the notables of Mardin, Qadur beg, Manouk etc. ... then Christians and later Kurds from Turkey began coming down to here … the Christians from Mardin, Nisibin, Diyarbakir upon hearing the fact that the city is flourishing have started migrating to here … and they made the city, our schools, churches, foundations, agriculture, crafts and so on … we built it up, *yet* we have lost the majority here.[402]

A female member of a distinguished family in Qamishli, who throughout our entire interview tried to project an image of harmony and coexistence, eventually couldn't overcome the temptation to reveal her real distress for all they believed they had lost.

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[402] Khayyat, interview with the author, March 2005, al-Qamishli, Syria. [al-khiyyat also a person?]

> It is the unification between Egypt and Syria which literally killed the life in Jazira. The Christian employees in the municipality were replaced by some foreign Egyptians. The clubs, the cabarets were all shut down. Foreign actors or theatre shows stopped coming by here. Qamishli died. Our schools were nationalized. The factories and the mills were nationalized. All were granted to the peasants, Christian and Muslim both. The owner of the property and the peasant were levelled. No, even worse; if the peasant has ten kids, he was given more. The old good days were over … this is true not only Qamishli, but for the whole of Syria. Qamishli used to be a place of attraction. The unemployed Aleppines used to look for jobs here. Christian women from Hassaka used to come here for shopping. All died away. And people starting migrating away from the city. And it became empty in the end. We became less due to emigration and the number of Kurds increased due to their immigration from Turkey and Iraq. Eventually, the place became a "mess."

Narratives of the Jaziran land and peoples is another idiom though which the Syriacs re-construct the "community" in relation to the Kurds. In the Syriacs' picture of post-genocide the Syrian Jazira, Kurdish immigration to Jazira is either absent or, more often, related to their poverty in Turkey; but, most significantly, their flight is deferred to the 1950s. The novelty of the Syriac presence in the French Jazira is underrated; an eternal and possessive Syriac presence in the region is assumed in its stead. The published works move between a denialist and a modernist assimilationist perspective. Jozef Asmar mentions that there was only the nomadic Arab tribe, the Tayy, in Jazira upon the Syriacs' arrival.[403] The Kurdish presence and their refuge in the Syrian Jazira, in his narrative, are passed over in silence. Reading this emphasis against the current situation of the Kurdish issue and the dominant ideology in Syria will reveal that his narrative affirms the Ba'th thesis about the Arab origins of the region.[404]

> In Syrian Jazira, there were Arab groups (*tacammuat 'arabiyya*), Bedouins and the Arab Tayy tribe, living on husbandry and at times camping around the Jaghjagh River to use its water for drinking purposes. These Arabs received the refugees graciously while the Syrian government embraced them and guarded them under its auspices.[405]

Asmar's stance is informed by the Aramaist nationalist ideology, though. Throughout the book, he argues that the roots of the Syriacs in geographical Syria stretch back to the Aramean empire which gave them their language, liturgy and literature, 1,800 years ago. As mentioned before, the Aramaist perspective emphasizes the Syriacs' Christian roots, arguing that the Semitic Arameans underwent a change of name after they had embraced Christianity and were then called "*Syriacs.*" Thanks to its Semitic and non-ethnic religious references, the Aramaist thesis is promoted jointly by the Syriac Orthodox Church establishment and the Syrian state, as also exemplified in the above quotation.

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[403] Jozef Asmar Malki, *Min Nisibin*, p. 38.
[404] The Ba'th history recuperates the history of certain peoples, Canaaties, Arameens, Nabateens, to demonstrate the specificity of the Syrian Arabs, while neglecting the evidence about other non-Semitic people such as the Hurrites. Stéphane Valter, *La Construction Nationale Syrienne*, chap. 3.
[405] Jozef Asmar Malki, *Min Nisibin*, p. 38.

The Syriac writer, Ukin Boulis Munufer Barsoum embraces a modernist assimilationist perspective which is also in line with the Aramaist sectarian/nationalist ideology. He refers to the Kurds as one of the refugee groups in the same category as the Armenians and the Syriacs and, as such, continues:

> After the Syrian state has consolidated its power and established the security in the region 1923 (!), it started receiving different groups of people from the neighbouring regions, Syriacs, Kurds, and Armenians. There they met the Bedouin Arabs [*al-arabi al-badu*] who settle in Jazira and they all melted into one pot, which is the pot of Syria [*insaharu cami'an bi bawtaqa wahida, hiyya bawtaqat suriyya*].[406]

The immigration and settlement in the French Jazira takes another form in the Assyrian nationalist discourse, which views the Syriacs, Chaldeans and Assyrians as one ethnic group descending from the ancient Assyrians. Accordingly, the compulsory migration from Tour Abdin to the Syrian Jazira is viewed as a "displacement (*intiqal*) of the (organic) community from one point in the Assyrian homeland to another point." Accused of "ethnicising Christianity" and assigning a political identity to the members of these three different churches, Assyrianism is fervently opposed by the Syriac Orthodox and the Chaldean churches, and also by the Syrian state as it challenges the official recognition of the Syrian-Syriac community on religious basis. Yet, the Assyrianist idea of the ethnic unity of Syriacs, Chaldeans and Assyrians is influential among the Syriacs in Jazira, at least rhetorically; large sections of Syriac society avoid the political implications of this ethnic-nationalist view, however.

Despite the religious and ethnic overtones in the Aramaist and Assyrianist arguments, the claim for autochthony in the region as such contests the Kurdish historical and political claims in the Syrian Jazira. It also resonates with the official Ba'th line which traces the Kurdish presence in the region back to 1945 and legitimizes the Kurdish disenfranchisement in Syria accordingly. In this sense, the Syriacs' politically conformist discourse reflects and endorses both the anti-Kurdish discrimination in the Syrian Jazira and the complicity of other Christian communities in the unequal sectarian system.[407] It supports the reproduction of the existing ethnic and social inequalities/hierarchies in Syria. Informed by the anti-colonial and corporatist credentials of the Syrian Ba'th Arab nationalism, the Syriac sect eventually

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[406] Ukin Boulis Munufer Barsoum, *Al-Suryan fil al-qamishli*, p. 21.

[407] Picard, in the same article, mentions how the notions of security and freedom are the main elements in the Lebanese elites' strategy in drafting of legal and constitutional formulae, in their search for guarantees at a diplomatic level and in their governing of the territory and its different peoples. Elizabeth Picard, "Dynamics", p. 203. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the same notions were employed for similar ends by the francophone Jaziran elites throughout the movement for autonomy between 1936 and 1939.

imagines itself as a "religious, autochthonous and peaceful" community in an oppositional relation to the Kurds, implying that the Kurds are a "non-autochthonous and non-peaceful ethnic community." And here again appears the relatedness of the act of remembering with the power relations in the society.

The oral narratives of praise for the "absolute freedom" granted by the Syrian state in the Syriacs' memories *and* the imagining of a historically "docile" and "native" community remove any sense or necessity of politics from the picture, both in history and in the present. I claim that such an ahistorical and totalizing perspective went hand-in-hand with the depoliticization of the Christian groups throughout the post-colonial period in Syria. The *depoliticization* of the community, or imagining of an "*apolitical* community," is indeed one of the most fundamental characteristics of the Jaziran Christians' History. In one of the first books written on Jazira following Syrian independence (1946), the Jazirans are described as follows:

> The Jaziran people hate [*yamqut*] politics and turn to agriculture with all of their energy … that does not mean they do not understand politics but we mean that they see that their working in politics spoils their agricultural work … and in case they sometimes raise their voice, they do so in order to demand construction ['*imran*], improve agriculture and guarantee the prosperity of the region.[408]

The next chapter will argue that the political activism in the French Jazira between the years 1936 and 1939 and its repercussions among the Syrian Arab nationalists have a significant role, particularly with respect to the Christians' "distaste for politics."

Armenians

As far as the Armenians' memories of the early French mandate period are concerned, the narratives vary along the urban–rural axis and according to class position both back in Turkey, in the French Jazira, and today in the Syrian Jazira. Generational difference also plays an important role in the remembrances. Still, a period of struggle, hard-work and destitution following the deprivation and loss during and after the 1915 massacres and the 1925 Sheikh Said Revolt form the baseline of the post-genocide memories. Unlike other parts of Syria and Lebanon, the refugee camp as the first shelter with its canvas tents and, later, wooden shacks covered with corrugated sheet-irons, does not figure in the memories of the Jaziran

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[408] Osman Ramzi and Salim Hanna, *al-Jazira wa Rijalatuha* [The Jazira and its Men] (al-Qamishli: Khabur Press, n.d), p. 5.

Armenians as the first shelter they found. Judging by the very few French reports about the arrival of the post-1925 refugees in Jazira, it would appear that the newcomers, the majority being from rural backgrounds, extremely poor and vulnerable to infectious diseases, usually settled around the French military posts in Jazira in a dispersed manner. My interviewees, however, state that in the very beginning they usually stayed together with other Armenian and Kurdish families with whom they had travelled, under self-made tents or houses made of mud and grass. Clothes and food were distributed to them by international refugee relief organizations. At the same time, the French colonial state founded new villages exclusively for the Armenians, such as Tell Brak, Tell Abiad, Tell Beri and Tell Aswad. They bought the lands from Muslat pasha of Ghubur. In his report about Jazira in 1931, Dillemann states that "they live in houses made of bricks. Animals and people sleep in the same room with no doors and windows."[409]

Armenian memories of resettlement, too, refer to the "welcoming Arab environment" in the realization of the communal "success story," or what is called the "regeneration out of ashes."[410] The quotation below, by a member of an Armenian *maclis al-milli*, presents the dominant Syrian-Armenian communalist perspective vis-á-vis the Syrian state in a nutshell:

> Here [in Syria] we only have stories to tell; whereas in Turkey, we had problems and massacres. [*mashakil u madhabih*]. We call the one who gives birth and breeds/raises [us] as mother. We were born in Syria.[411]

The decree issued in 1917 by the Sharif of Mecca, Hussein Ibn Ali, for the protection of Armenians is usually referred to in order to epitomize Arab generosity and the peaceful relations between the Arabs and the Armenian refugees.[412] His speech, inscribed on a plaque, is present in all Armenian churches in Syria. Acts of altruism to the refugees, both by the urban Arabs and the Arab tribes along the deportation route in eastern Syria, are singled out as another indicator of generosity and intercommunal harmony. Faiz al-Ghusayn is another

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[409] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Box 550, Louis Dillemann "Etude de développement".
[410] For the post-genocide discourses of the Armenians on independence, see Vahé Tachjian, "Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion", pp. 60-65.
[411] Moses, interview with the author, al-Qamishli, Syria. May 2006.
[412] "… We inform you that in our Gratitude to Him, we are in good health, strength and good grace. What is requested of you is to protect and to take good care of everyone from the Jacobite Armenian community living in your territories and frontiers and among your tribes; to help them in all their affairs and defend them as you would defend yourselves, your properties and children, and provide everything they might need whether they are settled or moving from place to place, because they are the protected People of the Muslims about whom the Prophet Muhammad (may God grant him his blessings and Peace) said: 'Whosoever takes from them even a rope, I will be his adversary on the day of Judgement.' This is among the most important things we require of you do and expect you to accomplish, in view of your noble character and determination. May God be our and your guardian and provide you with His success. Peace upon you with the mercy of God and His blessings". Ara Sanjian, "The Armenian Minority Experience", p. 152.

writer who mentions the graciousness (*fadl*) of the Arab tribes around Diyarbakır in the protection they provided to the Armenians, despite that fact that Turkish government agitated for the opposite.[413] The attitude of the Ismaili people in Salamiyya towards the Armenian refugees is also underlined in Syrian-Armenian writing. Nora Arisian, in her book titled *Asda' al-ibada al-armaniyya fi al-sahafa al-suriyya* (The echoes of the Armenian genocide in the Syrian press) opens her survey essays with a reference to newspaper articles stating that "Arabs are the brothers of Armenians."[414] The publications by the Jebejian Library in Aleppo—one of the few examples of serious Arab–Armenian common work—also remain silent about the early encounters between the Armenian refugees and the local population under French colonial rule. The Middle East Armenian portal Azad-hye also restricts itself to highlighting the social and political harmony between the Armenians and the host society. Joint political struggle against oppressive Ottoman rule is presented as another proof of the everlasting Arab-Armenian brotherhood. The myth of generosity is then conflated with all times and all kinds of encounter between the newcomers and the host population.

Unlike the Syriacs' historical claim in the Syrian Jazira and their claim for autochthony, the Syrian-Armenians' hegemonic History and memories cast themselves in the role of "guests" (*dhuyuf*) and "migrants"(*muhajirin*) in Syria, the fundamental cause of this lying outside Syria, namely in Armenia and Turkey. This novel "guest" status in the Armenian establishment discourse silences the hostile encounters and economic, social and political conflicts between the local Syrians and the Armenian refugees upon their arrival, as will be explained in detail in the coming sections. Nevertheless, the so-called Armenian "indifferent guest-status" is not an essential trait possessed by the Syrian-Armenians, but one that was adopted in the early 1930s through negotiations with the ruling powers and the rest of the society.[415] Similarly, the post-genocide phase of the Syrian-Armenians represents a "communal success story" in the mainstream memories on the basis of the Armenians' "essential merits"—namely "hard-working, skillfulness, constructiveness and peacefulness"—against a background of "generous Arabs."[416] The emergent community is, then, depicted as a coherent, peaceful, middle-class collectivity in peaceful and harmonious relation with other communities (*taifa*), the majority (the local Syrian Arab population) and

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[413] Fa'iz al-Ghussain, *Matyred Armenia* (translated from Arabic, London, 1917), p. 55.
[414] Nora Arissian, *Asda' al-Ibada al-Armaniyya fi al-Sahafa al-Suriyya 1877-1930* [The echoes of the Armenian Genocide in the Syrian Press 1877-1930] (Beirut: Zakira Press, 2004), p. 106.
[415] Nicola Migliorino, *(Re)Constructing Armenia*, chap. 2.
[416] Several French officers attributed essential characteristics such as "hard-working" and "strong group solidarity" to Armenians. Jacques Weulersse states that Armenians have "une solidarité ethnique sans rivale au monde". Jacques Weulersse, *Paysans de Syrie et du Proche-Orient* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946).

the ruling powers. Once again, the role of the "colonial bargaining" with the mandatory authorities or various other social and political negotiations with the local dynamics in Syria are underestimated. The Armenian sectarian discourse, then, naturalizes these socio-political and historical processes underlying the transformation of the Armenians into a middle-class group in Syria. Thanks to the Armenian sectarian ideology, individual success is written into the bottom line of the community and presented as a proof of survival against their deracination during the genocide. Below is an account uttered by a lower-middle-class Jaziran Armenian:

> Arabs greeted us with love [*muhabba*]. And we came here, we only processed, and built, but we never ruined anything. We even taught our artisanship to the Arabs. I wish we never trained them; they are going to take it off our hands. We never get involved with the state affairs. We only care about our own business. We took the same stance during the civil war in Lebanon. You know, we are tired of wars. We have been making wars for the last 800 years. The Arabs respect us a lot, so does the Syrian state. We have all the rights here. We are not like the Kurds. We are not rebellious [like them] because we have our *hayranik* [state], we are not impotent of founding a state. Or the Syriacs, they do not have a state, too. Since the Syriacs have forgotten their language, especially those from Mardin, and are very fond of money, they consider Syria as their homeland [*watan*].[417]

Kurds

As far as the Kurds are concerned, the discourse of amity and harmony between the "welcoming" Arabs and the newcomers—overtly vocalized at all times and by all means in the memories of the Jaziran-Christians, Armenians, Syriacs, Chaldeans and Protestants *and* the official Ba'th narrative—is absent. Unlike the 'pro-Syrian state deviations' in the narratives of especially the Syriac establishment, the presence of the French mandatory rule, for instance, as opposed to a Syrian government, is openly acknowledged as the one and only authority found upon their arrival in Syria.

The Kurds convey vivid details about the hardship of everyday life and their means of survival, similar to the lower-class Christians' memories of the early days in Jazira; however, the Kurds' memories are less woven with misery. Stories about smuggling and trans-border passage between Turkey and Syria for work purposes hold an important place in these memories. More importantly, the memories are not enmeshed in a discourse of gradual progress or revitalization of the Kurds in Syria like those of the Christians. Rather, Kurds' memories are framed within two seemingly contradictory narratives which address the present inequalities and oppression: narratives of freedom and discrimination.

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[417] Khatchig, interview with the author, April 2006, al-Qamishli, Syria.

> The French rule was nice [*xweş*]. It did not interfere in our lives. We were allowed to move freely between *binxet* and *serxet*[418]. The border was open. We used to smuggle sheep, tobacco from Turkey and take dates from Syria. Then they closed the border and put mines, they took our freedom. All the problems started with the Arab state … . But we didn't benefit anything from the French rule. France was encouraging the Christians. Everything was in the hands of the Christians.[419]

Unlike the Armenians and Syriacs' memories of harmony and security, which imply a 'communal self-realization' in the Syrian phase of their lives, the Kurds adopt a discourse of regret for having "missed the favourable opportunities such as a semi-independent Kurdish federation." Unlike the memories of the impoverished ex-elites of the Jaziran Syriac community, the past is not a domain where the Kurdish nation crystallizes in its purest form.[420] Unlike the representations of past and community among other diasporic communities, nostalgic memory is not the defining feature of the Jaziran Kurds' memories.[421] On the contrary, if anything is evoked by the memories of the mandate regime, especially in the narratives of the secular nationalist second-generation, it is regret and despair due to the "lack of a Kurdish nation" (*sha'b*) in the past. The religiosity and tribal affiliations are argued to be the deficiencies underlying the "absence" of a "real Kurdish nation." It is this "false awareness" that is argued to pave the way to siding with the "unfaithful Arabs" in political matters, such as supporting the "Arab cause" during the struggle for Syrian independence. The "real Kurdish community" emerges, in the (post) memories of the Jaziran Kurds, with the arrival of the Kurdish political refugees from Turkey in the French Jazira, in particular the religious sheikhs and mollahs (*mela)* to Amouda (Kur: Amûde). The arrival of the nationalist/religious cadres of the Sheikh Said Revolt after 1925 marks "a nationalist enlightenment." Similarly, the Syrian Kurdish writers seldom focus on the social history of the region in the 20th century, but their interests lie either in the ancient history of Jazira or the geopolitical aspects of the Kurdish conflict in the region.[422]

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[418] Serxet and binxet signify the regions above and below the border/ the Baghdad railway line, respectively.
[419] Abu Ruken, interview with the author, May 2005, Amouda, Syria.
[420] For a similar argument regarding the diasporic Syriac community in Germany, see Heidemarie Armbruster, *Securing the Faith* , Conclusion.
[421] Literature on nostalgic memory is vast and ranges across a variety of disciplines. The most convenient for our purposes is Leo Spitzer, "Back Through the Future: Nostalgic Memory and Critical Memory in a Refuge from Nazism", in Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe and Leo Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory*: *Cultural Recall in the Present* (Dartmouth: University Press of New England, 1999), pp. 87-104.
[422] *Hiwar* is one of the few periodicals (yet illegally published and distributed) which publishes articles about controversial historical incidents in the wider transborder region, including the Armenian massacres, the Sheikh Said Rebellion in Turkey and the Amouda events in the Syrian Jazira.

Syrian-Arabs

How does Syrian-Arab History remember the mandate period? First, one has to differentiate between the works produced during the mandate period, and the post-colonial historiography on the mandate period. While the post-independence Arab nationalist historiography assumes the existence of a full-fledged and coherent national body (engaged in anti-colonial struggle), the early published works as well as the memories of Syrian-Arabs dating from the mandate period are marked by "agency deficiency" and "sovereignty deficit," in which Syria as a territorial entity is "not fully possible," or—borrowing from Ghassan Salamé—"is always less" (*du toujours moins*) thanks to the colonial situation.[423] This aspect becomes especially obvious with respect to refugee and border issues, namely the two *sine qua nons* of the modern nation-state, population and territory.

Another peculiarity of the mandate period, which has been ignored in the post-colonial historiography, was the often voiced distinction and hierarchy between the "good French" (in France) and the "bad French" (in Syria).[424] Syrian-Arab nationalists of the 1930s resisted the French mandatory rule within a modernist and eurocentric belief in the superiority of the western culture and civilization. A fervent Syrian-Arab nationalist, Fakhri al-Baroudi, stated in his memoires that "his visit to France after the boycott of the French goods in Syria in 1931, made him realize the extreme disparity of behaviour between the [corrupt] French functionaries in Syria" and "the simple French on the streets [in Paris]," whom he views as "modest, gentile, noble and generous."[425] The anti-French stance of Syrian-Arab nationalist politics, especially in the years following the signing of the Franco-Syrian treaty (1936), also rested upon the good French vs. bad Syrian-French distinction. The nationalist press recognized the superior virtues of the French civilization, as embodied in the principles of the French Revolution, and protested against the renunciation of these principles by the mandatory authorities themselves. The "bad French" motto, of course, was not shared across all classes and ethno-religious groups in Syria during the mandate rule. Keith Watenpaugh demonstrates that the highly-praised anti-colonial resistance does not cover all the sections of

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[423] Ghassan Salamé, *al-Mujtama' wal-dawla fil-Mashriq al- 'arabi* [Society and State in the Arab Mashriq] (Beirut: Markaz dirasat al-wahda al-'arabiyya, 1987), p. 59.
[424] White views the distinction as a rhetorical device for the nationalist elite to advance their interests and sustain their hegemonic position in the local society. Benjamin White, "Rhetorical Hierarchies in France and Syria During the Mandate", *Chronos: Revue d'histoire de l'université de Balamand*, No. 17 (2008), pp. 105-23.
[425] Fakhri al-Baroudi, *Sittun sana tatakallamu* [Sixty Years Speak] (Damascus, 1961), p. 38. For another account of the (corrupt) French officers, see Abdallah Hanna, "Karamun fi ghayri Mahallihi: Min Ma'asi al-Intidab al-Faransi al-Isti'mari" [A Generosity out of Place: From the Tragedies of the Colonial French Mandate], *al-Tali'a* 199 (1979).

society. He points out the significance of the French politics of religion in determining the differences in political, social and ideological stances towards the colonial politics.[426] Elizabeth Thompson, on the other hand, nuances the meaning of anti-colonial politics and shows that the resistance by women in the women's movement were indeed different from the then mainstream anti-colonial politics.[427]

As far as the post-colonial writings are concerned, Syrian historian Abdallah Hanna lucidly demonstrates that generational difference and class have played important roles in one's rememberings and political stance *both* during the French mandate and in the independence period. Based on his fieldwork in the 1970s, Hanna demonstrates that for the earlier generation who had lived through the sufferings of the *seferberlik* the mandate years evoked security and stability; while for the next generation, who had become politicized during the mandate years, anti-Frenchness was more emphasized. Nevertheless, the latter, too, did not refrain from acknowledging the superiority of the colonial western culture and celebrating the French introduction of western understandings of order, law, administration and justice.[428]

It may be argued that the underlying factor in the above-mentioned difference in the rememberings of the Syrian Arabs through the years was the *change* in the terms of the power relations and the accompanying *change* in the truth regimes at the level of society in general and in the community level in particular. The *change* in the composition of the dominant classes, namely the decline of the old elites and their replacement by new groups from rural backgrounds, played a tremendous role in the way past is dis-(re)membered, both by the subalterns, and by the old as well as the new elites. Following the agrarian reforms in Syria (1959-1964) and the nationalisation of capital, the same Arab nationalist, Fakhri al-Baroudi, would state "insultez avec moi toute personne qui a lancé une pierre contre le colonisateur, vous voyez aujourd'hui la situation á laquelle nous avons conduit la patrie au temps de l'indépendance."[429]

As far as Jazirans' memories are concerned, unlike the Syrian-Arab elites who had suffered from a "sovereignty deficit" during the mandate years, the refugees in the French Jazira were treated in ways that they had not previously enjoyed in their former homes in

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[426] Keith Watenpaugh, *Being Modern*, chap. 10, "Not Quite Syrians: Aleppo's Communities of Collaboration", pp. 279-99.
[427] Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens,* part III, pp. 113-55.
[428] Abdallah Hanna, "Pour ou Contre le Mandat Français", p. 183.
[429] Mouti al-Samman, *Watan wa 'Askar: Qabla an Tudfana al-Haqiqa fi al-Turab: Muthakkirat 28 Aylul - 8 Athar 1963* [A Homeland and Soldiers: Before Truth is Buried: Memoirs of 28 September – 8 March 1963] (Bisan lil-Nashr: Damascus, 1995), p. 228.

Turkey. This was especially true for the Christians. This shift in power relations from the Ottoman Empire/Turkey to French colonial rule is where the initial *change* in the hegemonic ideology lies for today's Jazirans, the hegemonic groups and the practices during the French mandate. The second big *change* came with the regime change following the termination of the French mandate in 1946. The post-colonial Syrian state aimed to obstruct the colonial sectarian system through imposing a unitary nationalist rule. In reality, they de-politicized the sects and society at large; yet kept the religion-based sectarian system intact in civil matters. The Arabization and nationalization projects following the Ba'th revolution in 1966 significantly changed the local power dynamics in the Syrian Jazira. Almost all the members of the colonial elite in Jazira left for western European countries in this period. Added to this process was the economic and demographic impoverishment of the Christian population since the 1960s. The most recent *change* is the processes that started in the 1990s, when the adverse effects of globalization started to be felt more openly, the Kurdish problem entered a new phase, and the neo-imperial undertakings in the region gained new momentum. It is these political and socioeconomic processes, revealed as socio-economic and political recovery, and deprivation or embourgeoisement of certain ethnic and religious groups at the expense of others, which sets the context of the Jazirans' rememberings of the French mandate period in today's Syria. It is in this very context that the emergent main actor in today's Jazirans' memories, namely the sect (*taifa*) or the nation (*sha'b*), is revealed through constant negotiation with the two actors addressed in the historical narratives—the Arabs and the French—representing the post-colonial dominant power and the ex-colonial power respectively.

One of the main arguments of this chapter is, then, that the French colonial politics of difference together with its contestation by the Syrian Arab nationalist discourse have furnished today's Jaziran Christians and to a certain extent the Kurds with the necessary material and discursive resources to retrieve the history of the 'sect/nation'. The uprooting of the communities back in Turkey, followed by the French religious, social, economic and cultural policies in the French Jazira and the over-visibility of the Christian population in the urban space, inflated their Christian selves over their Kurdish townsmen. The colonial period obviously did not affect all the groups in the same way. The French mandatory rule pursued a hesitant Kurdish policy; they did not intend to turn the Kurdish refugees into middle-class Francophiles as was roughly the intention with the Christian refugees. The colonial experience is coupled with the Christians' relatively easy acceptance into Syrianness, against Kurdish marginalization and assimilation in the post-colonial period. It is these two socio-

political processes that underlie the Armenian, Kurdish and Syriac communalist subjectivities in the Syrian Jazira.

The French colonial policy in Jazira was never as coherent and coordinated as the colonial discourse assumed, nor as trivial or confined to the cultural sphere as the Jaziran-Christians argue today. Below, I will try to set out the French views and politics with respect to Jazira and its peoples. I will juxtapose the Jazirans' memories of the colonial period with the colonial history and colonial/nationalist discourses of the 1930s in order to understand two things: first, to trace the divergences and similarities between the colonial past and post-colonial narratives about colonial times, and, second, to show how the conduct of colonial rule is implied in ways that this "past" has been processed by the Syrian Jazirans, and eventually manifested itself in novel political and social subjectivities. In this manner, I will be able to set out how past events are constantly rewritten in terms of the present conflicts. The primary sources utilized in this chapter are the French and British archives, Syrian-Arab newspapers from 1920s and 1930s as well as the Dominican missionary reports, and the memories of Jazirans from different classes, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

It is the French representations and practices in Jazira to which we now turn.

The French lenses

Land

Unlike the mainstream Syriac memory, which highlights Jazira's *integrity* with respect to the rest of Syria and the historical/present *cohesion/harmony* between the Jazirans (the Syriac/Armenian) and the Syrians (the Arab), the French colonial ruling ideology emphasised the *particularity* and *distinctiveness* of the land and people of Jazira. The colonial discourse is played out in different fronts: The region was granted an autonomous administrative status like the other three autonomously administered governorates in French-Syria, those of the Druze, the Alawites and the Sanjak of Alexandretta. Racial taxonomies accompanied the French political project in Jazira. as well as this, essentialist categories about the ethno-religious groups in the region emphasized each group's uniqueness and dissimilarity from each other and from the rest of Syria.

Dividing Syria into four statelets on ethnic/religious basis was a technique of governmentality, i.e. the principle of *divide and rule*, as already mentioned. This colonial practice both revealed and reinforced the colonial representations of Syrian society (a mosaic

of races and religions) as well as the French understanding of Arab nationalism in Syria (an urban-Muslim phenomenon, which would potentially "infect" the minority-inhabited regions in Syria and even North Africa, the most precious part of the empire). In other words, granting administrative autonomy to Jazira and secluding it from the inner Syrian towns does not signify Jazira's *sui generis* nature, but it does give clues about the Syrian questions and the larger imperial concerns that the French mandatory authorities acted on. It is the very *disparity* between the questions and political concerns of the mandatory French and those of the Ba'th Syria that gives colour to today's Jazirans' (post)memories. As well as this, it is the French colonial concerns and practices that the memories relate to in different ways.

For the French in Syria, the region was bound up in three fundamental, yet contested Syrian questions, namely the refugee issue, the religion issue (later transformed into the minority issue) and the nomads (Bedouin) issue. The autonomous administration granted to Jazira was the end result of a particular settlement of these three issues borne out of a certain amalgamation of the French political, economic and ideological interests in French-Syria which are intrinsically tied to French imperial concerns in the French empire.[430]

Especially after the loss of Mosul and Cilicia, making Syria a profitable colony was more like a test case for the pro-mandatory circles in the *Parti Colonial* against the anti-Syrian majority in France.[431] The Orontes valley, the Euphrates valley and the Jazira plain in Syria were viewed as the most viable places for the intended maximization of economic returns. Several reports about the economic prospects (especially concerning its potentials for cotton and cereal production), irrigation and petrol possibilities were produced about these regions, in particular on Jazira.[432] The peculiarity of these reports is the intersectionality between the French economic concerns and the social and political concerns. Be it a report drafted by a missionary, a military officer or a Service des Rensignements (SR) officer, the French

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[430] In the first decades of the Third Republic, Quai d'Orsay did not simply tolerate Catholic projects, it actively funded them. They paid for missionary travel to and from the colonies and helped finance missionary schools, orphanages etc. Such subsidies were meant to underwrite humanitarian services, not evangelizing. But officials certainly knew that, for missionaries, the two were never separated. The investment paid off: the presence of 150 French Jesuit schools in Syria and Lebanon helped justify the French mandate after the First World War. Elizabeth Thompson, "Neither Conspiracy nor Hypocrisy: The Jesuits and the French Mandate, in Eleanor H. Tejiran and Reeva Spector Simon (eds.), *Altruism and Imperialism, Western Cultural and Religious Missions in the Middle East* (New York NY: Middle East Institute, Columbia University, 2002), p. 66-7. for the role of religion in French colonialism, see J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided, Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism*, *1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006).

[431] C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, "The French Colonial Party: Its Composition, Aims and Influence, 1885-1914", *The Historical Journal*, 14, 1 (1971), pp. 99-128.

[432] See the reports of Père Poidebard. MAE, E-Levant Syrie-Liban, Vol. 299, Père Poidebard, *Notes sur la Haute Djezireh*, 1926. CADN, Cabinet Politique, Fonds Beyrouth, Box 571, Rapport du Père Poidebard du 6.01.1928 sur la situation des Réfugiés en Haute Jézireh en Octobre 1927.

willingness for occupation and exploitation of Jazira was presented as a blend of economic, social and politically-inspired imperial concerns. Below, I discuss these questions in more detail.

The incorporation of the region into the French-Syrian national territory and consolidation of state power in the region were realised as late as 1930 following the rather retarded delimitation of the eastern stretch of the Turco-Syrian frontier on 3 May 1930. The region was declared a forbidden military zone starting from the Bayandour incident in 1923—an armed conflict between the French occupation forces and the Turkish-Kurdish joint force led by the leader of the Kurdish Hevêrkan tribe, Hadjo Agha.[433] In conjunction with this, the long-lasting border contest between Turkey and France, and the Druze revolt in southern Syria, led the French to withdraw its occupation forces up to the limits of Jazira, in particular the Khabur River. The High Commissariat had assigned the Djagh Djagh valley as the outer limits of the French authority and impeded the passage to the contested zone in order not to irritate the Turkish authorities.[434] The Jazira region was called "caza de Khérou" until the formation of the "Sanjak of Jazira" in 1930.

Although the colonial state's formal control was adjourned, the French SR (*Service de Renseignements*) officers, military officers, relief agents and missionaries were patrolling the region in the 1926-27 winter and autumn semi-independently, without any official recognition from the High Commissariat in Beirut.[435] Until the signing of the Convention of Good and Neighbourly Relations between France and Turkey in the beginning of 1926, the colonial presence in *Khérou* was marked mostly by reconnaissance tours by the French SR and military officers aiming to enter into negotiations with the Kurdish and Arab tribal sheikhs in

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[433] Due to the death of a French commandment at a clash at Bayandour, the clash between the occupation forces and the locals gained the status of incident and was called the "Bayandour incident". There is a pile of documents about the incident. It is marked as the incident which led to the slowing down of the French occupation of Jazira for another eight years until 1930. The French occupation forces around Bayandour were attacked first by the Turkish forces led by Ismail Hakkı Gündüz, and after that by a joint Kurdish force (Hevêrkan and some Ashitan tribes) led by Hadjo Agha which resulted in the death of twenty-one French soldiers, mostly Senegalese. After Hadjo submitted to French rule in 1926, he explained in his letters addressing the SR that he and some other Arab tribal leaders had been encouraged by Turkish military authorities since the 1920s to make unrest in Jazira. CADN, Fonds Ankara, Ambassade, no. 104, Compte Rendu no. 2539 du Général Billotte, représentant Haut Commissaire à M. l'Envoyé extraordinaire à Damas. Alep, 21 September 1926, pp. 1-3.

[434] Velud, *Une Expérience* , p. 308.

[435] Jean-David Mizrahi, "Armée, état et nation au Moyen-Orient. La naissance des troupes spéciales du Levant à l'époque du mandat français, Syrie, 1919-1930", *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 207 (2002/3), pp. 107-23; and Martin Thomas, "French Intelligence-Gathering in the Syrian Mandate, 1920-40", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2002), pp.1-32.

order to win them for the colonial cause.[436] One of the most distinguished French officers in the French Jazira was Lieutenant Pierre Terrier, the SR officer of the district (*caza)* of Khérou.[437] He patrolled the eastern part of Jazira[438] and he almost reached the most eastern part of the region, Demir Qabu (Demirkapı in Turkish) on the Iraqi border. Terrier worked as an SR officer in Khérou between 1924 and 1927. He was one of the key figures in the formulation of the "Kurdish policy" in the French Jazira, the so-called "Terrier plan."[439] He encouraged the arrival of Kurdish refugees from Turkey, cultivated good relations with their leaders and played an important role in the Kurdish cultural-nationalist awakening in Syria.

It is in the same years that Qamishli was founded (1926). The founding of Qamishli rested basically on economic and political concerns. The mandatory authorities attempted to counter the economically disadvantageous situation after the loss of Nusaybin following the delimitation of the Turco-Syrian border. The distinctive location of Qamishli, only 1,200 m. from Nusaybin, was deliberately chosen in order to facilitate the economic advancement of the Jazira region towards Aleppo by exploiting the Baghdad railway. Thereby, it would compete against the economic significance of Nusaybin. Among all other French-founded border towns, Qamishli played a central role in the peopling of the Jazira region. It turned into a centre of attraction not only for the Christian émigrés who had already settled in Hassake before 1926 or in the surrounding towns, but also for the impoverished Christian and Kurdish populations in the Turkish provinces of Mardin, Diyarbakır, Siirt. By the mid 1930s, Qamishli had become the social, economic and cultural centre of the Sanjak of Jazira.

In colonial discourse, Qamishli was depicted rather differently than its present-day representations in the mainstream Syriac memory. While the mainstream Syriac narrative imagines Nusaybin-Qamishli-Syria as one historic land, the colonial discourse highlighted the land's novelty and promoted Qamishli's self-development by tolerating the contraband trade

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[436] See the file CADN, E-Levant, Syrie-Liban 298, Situation de la Djézireh, le Général Billotte commandant *provist* de la 2eme division du levant délègue de haut Commissaire auprès du Gouvernement d'Alep à Monsieur le général haut commissaire de la république française en Syrie et au Liban et commandement en chef de l'armée Française du levant (3eme Bureau), Beyrouth, Alep 4 Juin 1928.

[437] Qamishli region was named Khérou before the former was founded in 1926.

[438] *Ashitiyya* is the Kurdish name referring both to the accent and the tribes lying between the eastern part of Qamishli and the town of Chil Agha (Cawadiye in Arabic) where the Kurdish tribe of Aliyan lives. Some of the Ashitan tribes are Haci Silimani and Dil Memikan. The Eastern neighbourhoods of Qamishli such as Qaddour Beg, Antariyya, and Qanat Al-Sues all have Ashitan accent.

[439] After he left Jazira in 1927, he became the attaché to the Political Cabinet of the High Commission where he centralized all the affairs affecting Franco-Kurdish relations in Syria. Faced with pressing demands from all three Kurdish enclaves, Kurd dagh, Kobani (Jarablus) and the Jazira, he embraced a pragmatic perspective and argued that the geographical disposition of the Kurdish enclaves in Syria rendered an independent Kurdish federation impossible; therefore, he proposed, "the Kurdish leaders and notables should concentrate all their attention on Jazira where one could hope to see the evolution of an autonomous Kurdish centre". Jordi Tejel, *Syria's Kurds, History, Politics, Society* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 28-29.

from Turkey. The colonial discourse did not refrain from relating the foundation of Qamishli to Nusaybin, such that Dillemann viewed Qamishli as the subsidiary (*succursale*) of Nusaybin, while Terrier, the "founder" of Qamishli, viewed it as an "antenna of Nusaybin."[440] However, the colonial project fundamentally intended to *disconnect Qa*mishli from Nusaybin economically, politically and culturally. They aimed to integrate Qamishli into the Syrian domestic market and vitalize Qamishli at the expense of Nusaybin, as stated in the words of the "founder" of Qamishli, Captain Terrier, on 5 June 1925:

> We needed an extraordinary solution to an unusual siuation. From the moment we thought that a railway line could form the border, we had to make a border town benefitting from a daily train and the rivalling nearby city which has a better and a more central location. The vital centre of northern region is Nissibin and it cannot be other than that, thanks to its location on the Baghdad Railway and being the head of Djagh Djagh which is the main artery of the High-Jazira.[441]

The same report continued as follows:

> The new centre should meet the same conditions like Nissibin in order to supplant the latter. The closer to Nissibin the better it is. Our efforts have made Qamishli not only a branch of Nissibin but also absorb its rival Nissibin where the Turkish train station is reserved for the Syrian commerce. Now Qamishli with its animated markets and solid buildings that have replaced the old ones can be considered as one of the secondary cities of Syria.[442]

The French occupation of Jazira was conceived as a moral obligation of France in the Levant. Contrary to the memories of the Syriac establishment, in which the community claims the central agency in the making of the region, the French sources assign agency to the colonial authority. Velud argues that establishing their success and prestige between the Tigris and the Euphrates was acknowledgment of the glory of the *Armée du Levant* and its generals. "The whole discourse attributed to the conquest of north-eastern Syria was not solely a fascination for the confines of Mesopotamia to be discovered, but equally it was a passionate attachment for the task of occupation to be accomplished and the mission to be realized."[443] This is why the terms such as "missionaries," "pioneers" or "builders" were frequently employed in the letters or memoirs in order to describe the French in Jazira.[444] These "missionaries" were furnished with the moral obligation to establish a novel Pax

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[440] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Syrie-Liban, Box550, Louis Dillemann, "Etude du Développement Economique, Kamishlié", Octobre 1931, p. 18.
[441] Ibid.
[442] ibid.
[443] Velud, *Une Expérience*, pp. 51-52.
[444] Velud, *Une Expérience*, pp. 51-52.

Romana in Syrian Mesopotamia.[445] *Le rapport générale de reconnaissance foncière de la Djézireh*, drafted in 1940 for cadastral purposes of the yet-undisciplined lands of the French Jazira, singles out the colonial agency in the making of Jazira. It reads: "L'autorité personnelle, sens politique du quelques officier SR rendaient la vie au plus fertile des pays fertile."[446] The same report states that:

> Qamishli is a creation of the mandate, or more exactly the work of the officers of Service Special du Levant (SS) who came one after another since 1923. At the time, there was nothing in the city other than a mill and a farmhouse of Kaddour Bey [the ex-kaimakam of Nusaybin]. The land was a wasteland and malaria was the master of the region. The exact place of the city was chosen by Lieutenant Terrier, officer of SS, then.[447]

Evidently, officers of the Service de Renseignement (SR), which was set up in 1921 played an important role in the control and administration of Jazira-like peripheral regions. They were indeed the only effective authority in these areas. The SR officers were allowed a free hand by the French military authorities (*Armée du Levant*) and wielded direct rule. They were like a special militia on the fringes of other functions of the High Commissariat (HC) and not answerable to the civil authorities.[448] The SR was reorganized in 1930 after the complaints of the Syrian Arab nationalists. *Service Special du Levant* (SS) was created in its place in 1930. The latter organization was meant to be administrative and came directly under the French HC in Beirut. However, until the end of the French mandate (1946) it was always the officers of SS who represented the military authority, which was the only effective authority in the autonomously administered regions in French-Syria.[449] In Jazira, disagreements of opinion arose between the local SS and the HC in Beirut, especially concerning religious and ethnic policies. The SS officers embraced relatively more pro-Kurdish or pro-Christian policies, while the HC adopted a more hesitant and pragmatic stance towards the "minorities" in Syria. At least until the Franco-Syrian treaty (1936), it was usually the former whose policies were put into practice in Jazira, and these at times stood in contradiction with the general political line in Beirut.[450]

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[445] Velud, *Une Expérience*, p. 52.
[446] République Syrienne, "Rapport Générale de la Reconnaissance Foncière de la Djézireh", 1940, p. 23
[447] République Syrienne, "Rapport Générale de la Reconnaissance Foncière de la Djézireh", 1940, p. 23
[448] Christian Velud, "French Mandate Policy in the Syrian Steppe", in Martha Mundy and Basim Musallam (eds.) *The Transformation of Nomadic Society in the Arab East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 68.
[449] Velud, "French mandate", p. 69.
[450] Martin Thomas, "French Intelligence-Gathering in the Syrian Mandate, 1920-40", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2002), pp. 3-4.

Another rival organization in the Jazira region was the *Contrôle Bédouin* (Bedouin Control Commission, CB). It represented the military authority in the desert region which lay more to the south. In 1934, the CB was disbanded and replaced by Syrian officers, and the Camel Corps were replaced by a desert police.[451] However, as Velud argues, the rivalry between the SS and the CB continued through the mandate period.[452]

A large part of the weightiest and extremely detailed reports about the archaeology, demography, infrastructure and economic and political prospects of the region were produced during the period of relative neglect (1925-1930), and they were produced by SR officials on the basis of their correspondence with the nomadic and semi-nomadic Arab and Kurdish tribes of the region. Despite the fact that the attitude of the High Commissariat towards the region was one of relative neglect, these reports were not totally disregarded, nor were the endeavours of the SR officers disapproved of by the central mandatory authorities in Beirut. Paradoxically enough, it is also during the same period that the refugee flow from Turkey to the French Jazira reached its peak. In October 1927, there were around ten thousand refugees in total, with 3,850 Christians and 6,000 Kurds in the district (*caza*) of Hassaka and Khérou.[453] Regarding the urban centres, there were 1,500 Christians, and 150 Kurds and Christians from Mardin in Hassaka; 59 families in Ras al-'Ayn; 1,000 people from the Kurdish tribe Kikan in Dirbassiyya; 1,210 families in Khérou (130 Jewish families, 250 Christian families, 830 Kurds); 1,200 people in Amouda, mostly Kurds from the Daqquri tribe as well as 38 Jacobites (Syriacs), 3 Armenian Orthodox, 15 Catholics. In Qamishli, there were 2,300 habitants in October 1927 (130 Jewish families, 650 Christians with 45 Jacobites (Syriacs), 8 Armenian Orthodox families, 18 Catholic families, 100 Muslim Kurdish immigrants of Mardin or Arab merchants from Dayr al-Zor).[454]

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Velud compares the French colonial settlement project in Jazira with the French colonization in Algeria and concludes that the Jaziran case is not one of classical colonialism

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[451] Velud, "French mandate", p. 69.
[452] The Contrôle Bedouin was often accused of particularism and domination by the military and the SR, and criticized for the independence of certain officers—see in particular the criticisms of Lieutenant-Colonel Ripper, commander of the Euphrates region, advanced by the famous Müller, military commander of Day al-Zor. Velud, *Une Expérience*, pp. 243-262.
[453] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Fonds Beyrouth, Box 571, Rapport du Père Poidebard du 6.01.1928 sur la situation des Réfugiés en Haute Jézireh en Octobre 1927.
[454] Ibid.

like Algeria where nearly one million French settlers were living by 1954.[455] In today's Jazira, comparing and contrasting French-Algeria to the French Jazira in terms of colonial settlement policies is nearly unthinkable. This is not because there were fundamental differences between the two cases, but mainly because of the workings of the official nationalist and communalist/sectarian ideologies that are, paradoxically enough, both anti-colonial and ahistorical at the same time. The Ba'th ideology insists on the eternal Arabness of the Jazira region and its inhabitants while the Aramaic-Syriac nationalism, makes claims for autochthony in the region. Accordingly, the dominant Christian memory in today's Jazira underestimates the French colonial design of peopling the region with the Kurdish and Christian immigrants from Turkey. As will be demonstrated below, despite the fact that the debates around the issue of refugees (*muhajirun*) formed one of the most controversial issues in the Syrian-Arab nationalist press in 1920s and early 1930s, there is nearly no reference to the colonial factor as facilitating the refugees' arrival in Jazira in the hegemonic Christian memories today. In present-day Jazira, it is only the Kurds who are legally and discursively othered as "Refugees."

As a matter of fact, as Tachjian argues, the French Jazira is an example of classical colonisation thanks to the French settlement of "colons," namely the Christians and Kurdish refugees from Turkey; however, the fact that the settled population was not homogenous and adopted different political stands vis-à-vis the colonial authorities distinguishes the Jaziran "colonization" from classical colonialism.[456] Tachjian singles outs the three fundamentals of western colonization in the words of one of the most fervent supporters of the French mandatory rule in Syria, Robert de Caix, that (firstly) the Upper Jazira had to be effectively "*colonné*" by a Christian population that was (secondly) "traditionally *loyal*" to French, and (thirdly), the region where there is no one but only a dust (*poussière*) of nomads has to be "*remettre en valeur*."[457]

The idea of "reinforcing the Christian element whom [the French] can rely on in order to counterbalance the Muslim population and making Syria a mixed country"[458] formed an inseparable component of the making-up of the French Jazira. Inspired by the idea of an

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[455] Velud, *Une Expérience*, Vol. 3, p. 413.
[456] Vahé Tachjian, *La France en Cilicie et en Haut-Mésopotamie*, p. 294
[457] MAE, E-Levant, 1918-1940, Irak, Vol. 51, lettre de Robert de Caix, haut commissaire p.i. en Syrie-Liban, à Alexandre Millerand, président du conseil et ministre des AE, 8 Avril 1920, Beyrouth, ff. 185-187.
[458] CADN, Syrie-Liban, Box 586, lettre (no.612/KD) de Weygand au ministre des Affaires Etrangères, 25 August 1924

imperial France revitalizing the glorious Roman civilization,[459] this perspective is comparable to the French border policy, as indicated in the words of Raymond Poincaré,

> Nous tendons, en effet à installer les réfugies principalement le long de la frontière turque, ce qui offre l'avantage d'établir dans ces régions des populations chrétiennes que leur intérêt tourne vers la France et de constituer ainsi une séparation entre l'élément musulman syrien et les musulmans turcs.

As will be elaborated in more detail in the coming sections, peopling the "virgin" Jaziran land with the "Christians from Tour 'Abdin, with their wild manners [*moeurs farouches*] and warrior nature [*tempérament guerrier*] like their Kurdish neighbours" was viewed as the most appropriate solution that served two aims: Firstly, as already mentioned above, "to counterbalance the Muslim element and make Syria a mix country through reinforcing the Christian element"[460] and secondly the aim of forming an agricultural population in the French Jazira. The semi-nomadic Arab and Kurdish tribes would be encouraged to sedentarize and be added to the agricultural labour force. The other Christian communities, in particular the Catholics, "with their less ardent and more civilized attitudes," would form the urban population. The French aspiration for Jazira was that it would be made into a separate physical and social space for the by-definition "loyal Christian populations" and the Kurdish peasants.

Still, the religious and racial taxonomy of the local French officers was more nuanced than that of the French central authorities. For instance, although Père Poidebard, a devoted researcher of Jaziran archaeology and one of the most respected officials of the Central Refugee Committee (*Comité Central des Réfugiés*), which played a very important role in Hassaka in bringing assistance to Armenian refugees, divided the newly-arriving refugees basically on the basis of their religions, he refined the picture as follows: "Jacobites, Armenian Orthodox, Catholics (Armenian, Syrian, Chaldean), Jews from Nusaybin, military personnel (single or with their families) and Kurds with a tribal belonging in the 'caza of Hassetche' (Hassetce, Ras al Ain, Karamanie) and in the 'caza of Khérou' (Amouda, Kamechliye), which in total made 3,850 Christians and 5,000 Kurds." The Christian refugees, stated Poidebard, were mostly from Mardin or the region around Tour 'Abdin; they usually came to Jazira to make commerce in the frontier posts. The people from Tour 'Abdin either came singly or with their families to serve in the *Légion Syrienne*. He also mentioned the "Christians from the Kurdish race," namely the "Averkiye" (the Gallicized spelling of the

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[459] MAE, E-Levant, Syrie-Liban, Vol. 299, Père Poidebard, "*Notes sur la Haute Djézireh*", 1926.
[460] Ibid.

Kurdish tribe *Hevêrkan*), which he considered as "half Sunni Muslim, half Christian tribe of chef Hadjo" and the Christians of the Jabal Omerian, whom he viewed as "mixed with Kurds." Poidebard stated that this "mixed racial identity" facilitated the relation (*rapports*) between the Kurds and the Christians, as "the peasants from Tour Abdin were not much different in life style than the Kurds." The Syrian Catholics, he stated, were more civilized than the rest and they were the earliest comers to *Kamichlié* in 1927 from Hassatche. While emphasizing the similarity between the Kurds and Christians, he emphasized the animosity between the "refugee Kurds from the mountains" and the "Kurds of the plains," whom he viewed as "arabized" to a large extent.[461] Similarly, Dillemann viewed the Yezidis and the Christians from Tour Abdin—who, in today's Syrian Jazira, differentiate themselves from the rest of the Kurds and represent themselves as the "autochthons and the real owners" of the Syrian Jazira—as "adjuncts" of the "mountainous Kurdish population." [462]

Nevertheless, the pro-Christian settlement policy should not be taken as a full-fledged and fully-consented-to policy among different sections in colonial circles. In reality, there was a difference of opinion between the HC on the one hand, and the military and the local SR officers on the other. Despite the fact that the French archives are full of reports, propositions and notes by Père Poidebard, Robert de Caix, Terrier, Dillemann and several other SR officers in favour of colonization of Jazira with the "*fidèle*" populations in order to counterbalance the Muslim population in Syria and form a buffer zone between the Turks and the Arabs, the High Commissariat always maintained a more cautious stance against overstating the difference and following a radical pro-minority policy. The cautious attitude of the HC had political and economic aspects which were interlinked.

The economic, social and political problems and their repercussions following the arrival of the refugees in other parts of Syria, in particular Aleppo, were taken as a sign by the HC that "Syria was full," and the colonial power would soon have severe political legitimacy problems in the eyes of the Sunni Muslim "majority." This became more obvious after a crisis of accommodation in Aleppo in 1924 following the arrival of 30,000 new Armenian refugees. Velud states that "one thing was certain, these refugees cost too much to the mandatory authorities, more than they can afford and more than the Syrian budget allows."[463] In March 1924, the French government even proposed a population exchange of the Christians of

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[461] His observation was not totally wrong, especially up until the end of the French mandate. For the political implications of the tribal conflicts between the groups of Kurds, one must await the post-1936 politics in Jazira.
[462] L. Dillemann, "Etude du Développement Economique, Kamishlié".
[463] Velud, *Une Expérience*, Vol. 3, p. 419.

Cilicia and Anatolia, with the Turks of Alexandretta, based on the Turco-Greek model. However, at the time the Turkish government did not respond to this informal proposition. In May 1924, the High Commissioner Weygand drew attention to the dangers of Christian immigration to French-Syria and he proposed some solutions, such as systematically repatriating the same number of Turks living in Syria, turning back the immigrants, or granting new credits for their installation in Syria.[464] However, none of these propositions were realized.

Another instance that led the HC to revise its politics of difference, this time regarding the Kurdish issue, occurred immediately after the Druze revolt (1925-1927). The central mandatory authorities, having already realized that administrative autonomy on ethnic/ religious grounds excited the Arab nationalist sentiment, as witnessed in the Druze revolt, explicitly stated that "Making an alliance with some group of foreign origin in the country against the Arab population (*masse arabe*) might be an expedient in the times of crisis, but it shouldn't be established as a political principle."[465] Despite the fact that the Syrian Kurds were not considered by the central French authorities as a sect or a later as a minority group, nor were they envisaged to be sponsored like the Alawis or the Druze from the beginning, the SR officers were not a homogonous coherent whole either. While the majority of the SR in the French Jazira favoured the "Christian card," some Kurdophile SR officers criticized the former group for having ignored the "Kurdish card" since the late 1920s. Pierre Rondot, an SR officer from the latter group together with Roger Lescot, Thomas Bois and Terrier, was one of the leading figures in assisting the Kurdish intellectuals in the Kurdish nationalist movement in Syria.[466] A report by Rondot on the history and prospects of Franco-Kurdish relations in French-Syria, most probably drafted in the early days of WWII after the stormy 1930s in French-Syria, discussed the long-term effects of playing a "minority card" for all the

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[464] The whole file in MAE, Série E Levant, 1918-1940, Turquie, Vol. 258 is concerned with the refugee issue.
[465] Taken from Tachjian, *La France en Cilicie et en Haut-Mésopotamie*, p. 356. MAE, Levant, 1918-1 940, Syrie-Liban, vol. 181, Mémoire du Haut Commissaire p.i. au Ministre des Affaires des Etrangères, 17 Octobre 1928, Beyrouth, f. 49.
[466] Pierre Rondot (1904-2000) entered the military school at St-Cyr in 1922 and joined the Foreign Legion in 1926. He started working in the Service de Renseignements in 1928, then he was transferred to La Section d'études du Levant in Beirut. He met Robert Montagne, the director of IFEAD, who directed him to study the Kurds. During this career he knew the brothers Celadet and Kamuran Badirxan who soon became "loyal friends". He actively participated in the development of the Kurdish cultural movement in Syria. Pierre Rondot, "Syrie (1929), itinéraire d'un officier", in A. M. Bianquis and Elizabeth Picard (eds), *Damas, Miroir brisé d'un Orient Arabe* (Paris: Autrement, 1993), pp. 98-99. He collaborated with the Bedirxan brothers on the publication of *Hawar* (1932-1943). Between 1954 and 1967, he was the director of *Centre de Hautes études sur l'Afrique et l'Asie Modernes (CHEAM*), a institution founded by the *Front Populaire* for the educational formation of the colonial French officers in Levant and North Africa (1936-2000). Its first director was Robert Montagne, also the director of *IFEAD* (1936-1967).

parties involved in the game. His notes are very significant in revealing the unregistered yet tacit agreements in the colonial rule in Jazira. Rondot criticized the politics of sponsoring a *sous-minorité* group, which, he argued, "has become a handy tool in the hands of the local mandatory authorities to advance their interests, at the expense of more powerful minorities." He continued as follows:

> The danger for the privileged *sous-minorité* is the distrust and hostility of the other minorities whereas for the immediate victims of that policy there is continuous humiliation in economic and political spheres and loss of contact with the authorities. What has happened in Jazira is the loss of contact between the mandatory authorities and the majority of the population, Arabs and Kurds due to the interposition of a *sous-minorite — les Chretiens Mardiniotes.* These Christians, being persecuted by Kurds definitely have the right of protection by the generous French authorities. However, this protection, instead of tending to be a collective and permanent well-being, was applied in another manner: by recruiting a disproportional percentage of them in key positions in the administration and economic life of the Jazira. These Christians had vested interests in the continuation of the French sovereignty. Mixed with the population with whom they speak the same language [i.e. Kurdish], with whom they originate from the same region and have lived in harmony for several centuries, their role would be to collaborate with the Kurds and strengthen the French influence in the region. However, the privileged treatment of certain Christians and their systematic employment as translators, have created an atmosphere of hostility between the Christians and the Kurds, as well as an estrangement in the relations between French and the Kurds in the course of last five years. The Syrian Arab nationalists and the Turks have exploited the estrangement between the Syrian Kurds and the French. The protection of Christians is not a very reasonable policy when there is another minority whose population exceeds 25,000 people. The privileged ones were primarily the Syrian Catholics. They were protected and at times very unreasonably were advised by their religious leader Cardinal Tappouni and the priest Hebbé. In 1936, they founded a terrorist organization, *L'Insigne Blanc* [*al-shara al-bayda, En: White Badge*], which played an important role in the Muslim provocation against the Christians of Aleppo.[467] Sponsoring a *sous-minorité* like the Jaziran Christians has indeed lost its integrity since the *France combattante* came to power. In the meantime, it is also proved that certain privileged Mardiniotes were double-faced; they worked for the Turkish intelligence or made Turkish propaganda.[468]

The difference of opinion between the HC and the local SR officers would start to have more obvious political implications in Jazira from the mid-1930s onwards. The social and cultural implications of the politics of difference adopted by the French rulers of Jazira still continue to haunt the Syrian Jazirans, as revealed in the ways in which the Jazirans (dis)remember the mandate period. This issue will be dealt in more detail in Chapter 4.

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[467] For the White Badge, see Keith Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East*, pp. 255-278.

[468] Institut Kurde, Rondot papers, Les Kurdes, pp. 24-26, Rondot confirms the tactical necessity of collaborating with the minority in order to consolidate the colonial authority during the early formation period of the mandate. Still, he argues that there was no such need left in the 40s, thus proposes to level the minority cards by nominating Kurdish interpreters and Kurdish *Armée de Levant Adjoints* to the ranks of the French officers. His proposal was accepted by the HC. Accordingly, some of the Kurdish-French officers are as follows: Osman Hadjo, Mahmoud Kotreich, Bekri Kotreich, Memduh Barouh, Mahmoud Shevket, and Tevfik Nizameddin.

Economics

The economic aspect of the French settlement policy in Jazira formed the most fundamental component in the colonial making of the the French Jazira project. In the investigative and advisory reports by Père Poidebard the colonial mindset crystallizes in a perfect manner, merging the economic, political and ideological aspects in the making of the French Jazira. Having already made archaeological visits to the region in the early 1920s, Père Poidebard produced extensive reports about the situation of the refugees in 1925 and 1927. His reports spoke of the "*valeur*" of Haute Djézireh primarily in economic terms, but also politically, socially, religiously and lastly ideologically, for the interests of French-Syria and the French Empire at large. Referring to the region's natural riches ("its fertile soil traversed by several rivers and its perfect location in the massifs of Kurdistan") and cultural splendour in Antiquity, he embarked on describing the necessary measures for the *mise en valeur* of the Jazira, namely, flourishing of domestic and international trade in the region and economic and agricultural exploitation of its vast fields. The French settlement policy in the region makes sense only within this economic framework.

Based on Hassaka's rapid development—from only three houses in 1921 to 300 houses in 1925—thanks to its favourable location at the junction of the Khabur and Djagh Djagh Rivers and a stable French military presence since early 1921, Poidebard proposed several schemes for the advancement of French interests in this fertile yet poorly-inhabited region: extension of the cultivable zone, peopling of the uninhabited and uncultivated region with Christians drawn from Mardin, Kurdish refugees and Circassians. The intersection of French economic and political interests was even more emphasized in Poidebard's second report in 1927.[469] Though not very elaborate, an ethnic division of labour existed in this second report, where he envisioned the Kurds and Christians from the mountains turning into agriculturalists, the nomadic population becoming shepherds, the semi-nomadic population switching to work as agriculturalists and shepherds, and the Christian refugees from Mardin becoming shopkeepers and traders.[470]

In 1925, however, the only cultivated zone in the region was the already existing villages along the Turco-Syrian frontier band between Ras al-'Ayn and Tigris, the region around Jabal

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[469] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Fonds Beyrouth, Box 571, Rapport du Père Poidebard Sur la Situation des Réfugiés en Haute Jézireh en Octobre 1927, 06.01.1928.

[470] A political division of labour accompanies to is model. He embraces the model of indirect colonial rule, but referring to "the recent troubles in Sindjar due to the excessive independence granted to Yezidis by the British", he warns the French mandatory authorities "not to give too much independence to the *indigene* functionaries as there have been tribal and racial animosities".

Sindjar and the Khabur valley which were mainly inhabited by Kurds.[471] In this sense, the founding of small urban centres, towns and villages—namely Ras al-'Ayn (Serêkanî), Derbassiyya (Kur: Dirbêsî), Amouda (Kur: Amûdê), Qamishli (Kamişlo), Hassaka (Haseke), Derik (Kur: Dêrike) and 'Ain Diwar (Kur**:** Eyndîwer**)**—along the Turco-Syrian frontier between the years 1922 and 1930 indicates the French efforts to offset the loss of three important centres in the region, i.e. Mardin, Nusaybin and Jazira ibn 'Omr. In other words, efficient control of land, water and market communications were fundamental to mandatory rule. In this way, the region would be turned into an economically viable region and eventually be incorporated into the north-east Syrian market. Yet one has to wait until the 1930s for the peopling of the Khabur valley from Ras al-'Ayn to Euphrate (9,000 Assyrians from Iraq were settled in the high Khabur valley in the north of Hassaka in 1936) and the Djagh Djagh valley (Christians from Turkey were settled here after the foundation of Qamishli in 1926).[472]

In addition to compensating for the divorce of Jazira from its traditional hinterland in Turkey, the establishment of the above-mentioned administrative centres was viewed as a way to attract a refugee population to the French Jazira who were viewed as necessary for a well-functioning urban life and a profitable countryside. These newly-founded urban centres and villages should be seen, then, as the embodiment of the French colonial intention of opening up the Jaziran land to agriculture and to agricultural labour. Until the early 1930s, these urban centres were purely commercial centres (*souq-villes*). Accordingly, the principal markets of export were the ones which were close to the transportation facilities and other markets. Among these cities along the Turco-Syrian border, Qamishli has evolved as the most important commercial, social and political centre of Jazira, whose population exceeded 15,000 in 1939 only thirteen years after its foundation by Captain Terrier. At only 1.5 kilometres from the centre of Nusaybin, it was linked by train to Aleppo, with which it had strong commercial ties. The budget of the Qamishli municipality reveals its fast progress: 32,764 francs in 1927, 350,000 francs in 1931, 1 million in 1936 and 1, 271,600 in 1941.

The new nation-state borders and sedentarisation have gradually changed the pattern of trade from traditional caravan traffic towards permanent local markets of the French Jazira. In Jazira, the Mosul-Aleppo route, which used to have Nusaybin and Mardin as major way

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[471] Lietunant Dillemann, "Les Français en Haute Djézireh", p. 23.
[472] For the Iraqi-Assyrian refugees and the discussions about their settlement, see Longrigg, *Syria*, p. 213; Bayard Dodge, "The Settlement of Assyrians on the Khabur", *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, 27 (1940), pp. 301-320; Longrigg, *Syria*, p. 213; Robert De Kelaita, "The Origins and Development of Assyrian Nationalism", unpublished MA Thesis, University of Chicago, 2006, http://www.aina.org/books/oadoan.pdf.

stations and stop at Taurus, was replaced by the Jaziran markets whose importance has steadily increased due to the increase in cultivated land in the French Jazira. The vitality of Qamishli was a proof of this novel development. The Amouda and Derbessié markets were on the way to having a significant place in the new trade networks.[473]

However, especially after the imposition of national borders and the flow of refugees from Turkey, clashes between the sedentary and nomadic tribes and small peasants over water and grazing rights became more frequent. Reports by the SR officers and French agronomists about the economic potential of Jazira (such as irrigated wheat or cotton cultivation in the region, the latter being the one most promoted) aimed to control and govern these clashes while striving to increase the area of cultivated land and the number of labourers in the region.[474] The following section concerns the "nomad question," one of the most influential Jaziran questions of the time, which indeed lost its relevance after the 1950s, or else was articulated in different idioms in the changing political contexts in post-colonial Syria.

Imperial Control and the Jaziran Question(s) in the 1920s

In today's Syria, it is the unequal communitarian system under a populist authoritarian rule that underlies state-society and intercommunal relations. Jaziran Christians view their past and present through the lenses of their state-defined sects, delineated on the basis of their respective religio-ethnicities; whereas the Kurds, devoid of recognition by the state in ethnic or any other terms, struggle to lay claim to a history of their own.. The fact that the Christians in general single out their difference in social and cultural spheres (especially vis-à-vis the Kurds), while emphasizing their unity (with the Syrian Arab majority) in each and every conversation regardless of the issue under discussion, is not the result of their atavistic qualities. Similarly, the fact that the Jaziran Kurds permanently remember the confiscation of their lands in Jazira and their citizenship rights by the (Syrian Arab) state in 1963, and they inscribe their whole history into the history of injustice and oppression, points to the crisis of state-sponsored unequal sectarianism combined with the adverse effects of global capitalism under an authoritarian regime. Consequently, economic and social hardships among different communities are articulated through the state-sponsored "separatist" language, which at

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[473] République Syrienne, "Rapport Générale de Reconnaissance Foncière de la Djézireh", 1940, p. 10.
[474] Bulletin Economique Trimestriel des Pays sous mandat Français, année 1926, troisième trimestre, "l'avenir de l'irrigation dans l'état de Syrie", pp. 1092-1088. The percentage of the agricultural population increased to 1/4 of the total land in 1941. République Syrienne, "Rapport Générale de la Reconnaissance Foncière de la Djézireh", 1940, p. 13.

another level de-politicizes these communities. What is (*not*) called a "Kurdish problem" in Syria is the most obvious manifestation of this crisis. The sectarian memories are another facet or response to this crisis; however, they reflect and reinforce the same politics of difference.

However, the dominant economic line of thinking in French colonial circles in the 1920s viewed High-Jazira as a zone of "nomad Arab-sedentary Kurdish conflict." The ways in which the issue was conceived and the methods proposed for its governing varied over time; but the mandate authorities viewed Jazira as a region where two different races, namely "the Kurd who descended from the mountains of the inner Asia and the Arab who came up from the desert steppes of the south" clashed with each other.[475] In the reports of the SR officers, the clashes and dissimilarity between the culture of the nomads and the agriculturalists were viewed as the main line of division in Jazira. Jazira, unlike its prosperous antiquity, was described as suffering from the "constant fight" between the pastoral nomads and the sedentary cultivators. The clash between "these two races" was viewed as inevitable, since each was assumed to correspond to a different life style and a distinct economy. The nomad-sedentary fight was viewed as an "eternal problem" of the Orient. [476] Dillemann often referred to the encounters between the nomad Kurds in the nomadic Arabs' territory in his detailed reports about the economic development of Jazira. Jazira was labelled as the country of sedentarisation of the Kurds, whereas Arabs formed the majority in the south.[477]

The sectarian/religious lense through which the French approached the urban settled populations were not usually adopted vis-à-vis the nomads or semi-nomads in the French Jazira. Dillemann viewed nomadism as a way of life (*genre de vie*) born out of physical necessity and as unbounded by modern political ideologies. For instance, despite the fact that the Kurdish issue in Jazira was not less important as a political movement and as an inter-state issue between Turkey and French-Syria in the 1920s, Kurdish nationalism was viewed as peculiar to Kurdish intellectual circles, which were assumed by definition to have weak ties with the tribal population, except with some tribal leaders such as Hadjo Agha or the leaders from the Kurd dagh ('Afrin) and Jarablus (Kobani) region. Common members of Kurdish nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes were not envisioned as coming under its influence. Despite

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[475] For a similar categorization of the Bedouins of Raqqa, see Katharina Lange, "Shawaya: Economic Mélange, Pure Origins? Outsiders' and Insiders' Accounts of Tribal Identity in Northern Syria", in Stefan Leder (ed.), *Shifts and Drifts in Nomadic-Sedentary Relations* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Verlag, 2005), pp. 99-122.
[476] Louis Dillemann, "La Haute Djézireh sous le Mandat Français", 1938, unpublished paper, taken from Velud, *Une Expérience*, Vol. 4, p. 133.
[477] Ibid. p. 13.

the fact that there were several debates about Kurdish nationalist demands in Jazira among the French officers in the Jaziran cities, as well as Damascus, Beirut and Paris, the nomad issue and the Kurdish issues were never seen as interlinked. Each issue had its own episteme and was governed separately. Besides, the French not only maintained the schema of *les nomades* (*bédouins*) vs. *les sédentaires*, which suggests that they viewed the two tribal groups as two distinct categories, but also deliberately attempted to keep urban Arab nationalist politics separate from rural politics. This aim was integral to the pacification of the nomad in Syria, as will be explained in more detail in the coming pages.[478]

The reports usually refrained from ethnicizing the nomads by assigning them ethnic Arabness or Kurdishness. Thereby, one frequently comes across statements such as the "Arabization of the Kurdish tribes of the plains [nomads]," or the "entanglement of the two races" (*enchevêtrement de deux races*) in the SR reports on Jazira. Social and cultural "commonalities" between the Arab and Kurdish tribes of the south was another frequently mentioned aspect in the region. For instance, Dillemann called the Alian and Hassanen "*métis*," namely being of Kurdish origin but intimately mixed with the manners of the Arabs—though he added that "both of their tribal leaders take pride in their Kurdish origins." He reported that several factors favoured this mixing, for instance that there had always been Arabs, especially Tayy, living in Kurdish villages, or that the Arab tribes of the south, the Sharabiyyin for instance, came to the north and camped on the Kurdish land.[479]

Rightly, the nomad vs. sedentary conflict in Jazira is a phenomenon that belonged to the early efforts of consolidation of state power in the region. The conflict pertains to a transition period where the modern nation-state structure was imposing its credentials on the nomad society through the mechanisms of imperial control. The imperial control ranged from frontier delimitation to regular tax collection, all of which amounted to an attack on nomadism and the traditional cycles of Bedouin agriculture and commerce.[480]

The nomad in relation to the sedentary has become marginal both in the Christians' and Kurds' historical narratives in present-day Syrian Jazira. Neither has it found a place in the nationalist canons of former refugee Armenian and Syriac communities who adopt the "bad Turks/Muslim vs. good Syrians" formula. It is rarely mentioned in the narratives of the first generation of Kurdish, Armenian or Syriac peasants to describe their precarious livelihoods

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[478] Martin Thomas, "Bedouins", p. 561.
[479] Dillemann, "La Haute Djézireh", p. 133.
[480] Martin Thomas, "Bedouin Tribes and the Imperial Intelligence Services in Syria, Iraq and Transjordan in 1920s", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2004, Vol. 38, No. 4, p. 561.

which were still on the verge of formation. The passage below is therefore a rare account in this respect. It comes from an aged Kurdophone Syriac woman originally from Bişêrî, Zarzil. Unlike the majority of my interviewees, she refers to the "threat" caused by the nomads and relates it to the absence of (colonial) state control. Her account can also be considered as one of the least fictionalized accounts about the early pains of settlement:

> "I am from Bisheriyya, Zarzil. We are not originally from Bisheriyya but during the days of the *ferman* we had found refuge there and become Jacobites. We came down here three years after the Sheikh Said … . I got married here when I was twelve … . There was [the] French, then … the days of the French rule, terrible … there was no trust, no security, no stability … the Arabs used to pillage our belongings every night, we used to hide all of our belongings. France intentionally didn't accuse the Arabs for pillaging … actually the French rule wasn't a real rule … . The real rule began with the Arab government."[481]

Today, the term "Badu" and the more pejorative term "Shawi" are usually used interchangeably to refer to the formerly nomadic and semi-nomadic Arab tribes of Jazira.[482] The notion "Arab," whenever it is mentioned by the Jaziran Syriacs, hardly refers to the Bedouin Arab habitants of Jazira, but usually addresses the state and the ruling power in an affirmative way. Notwithstanding, the Jaziran Christians' memories usually speak to the difference between the Kurds and the Christians, while avoiding disclosure of their relationship with the Jaziran Arabs, as if the latter were less of an agent in the unfolding of Jaziran society today. However, for the Jaziran Kurds, the notion "Badu" is assimilated under an ethnic Arabness and referred to as the "Other" in political, social and cultural terms. It does not connote merely ethnic groups, but a range of real and perceived political, class, cultural and regional differences. James Scott's metaphor is explanatory at this point: he argues that "the Malay typically experiences the shopkeeper and the rice seller not only as a creditor and a wholesaler, but also as a person of another race and religion. Thus the concept of class as it is lived is nearly always an alloy containing base metals, its concrete properties, its uses are those of the alloy, not of the pure metals it may contain."[483]

Accordingly, the (post) memories of the Jaziran Kurds rarely speak to the *historical* relations between the "Jaziran Arabs" and the "Jaziran Kurds," but usually refer to the clash of interests and the hostility between these two groups *following* the Ba'th Arabisation project in Jazira in the post-1968 period. (The project foresaw the transfer of the lands owned by the Jaziran Kurds to the non-local Arabs originally from southern-Syria. These Arabs are called

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[481] Nazo, interview with the author, February 2005, al- Qamishli, Syria.
[482] For the etymological origins of the term "Shawaya", see Katherina Lange, "Shawaya".
[483] Taken from Christa Salamandra, *A New Old Damascus: Authenticity and Distinction in Urban Syria* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 11. James Scott, 1985, p. 44.

ghamir, the submerged.) Those who employ a discourse of familiarity with the "Arabs" are the members of the Kurdish tribes from around Amouda, yet they nuance the notion "Arab." As my middle-aged Kuridsh interviewee from the Kurdish Daqquri tribe states: "we are brothers with the autochthonous Arabs [*'Arab 'asliyyin*], we see only the 'submerged' [*ghamir*] as the settlers [*mustawtinin*]." This demonstrates that the ethnic and religious labellings are historically constructed and structured by the present power relations.

In the early days of the mandate, the nomad question was viewed fundamentally as a security problem where a pacified steppe meant security and economic viability to the French. The mandate authorities primarily sought to regulate the population movement of the Bedouins rather than integrate them into the Syrian national polity. They relied on sufferance more than force.[484] The Syrian Desert (*baadiyyat al-Sham*), peopled by nomads and semi-nomads, covered almost two-thirds of the territory on both sides of the Euphrates (whose right bank is called *Shamiyya* and left bank is called *Jazira*). Here Arabs constituted the majority of the population, although there were also Kurds and Circassians on the eastern borders of the desert.[485] Traditionally, this steppe region was divided into two, the *ma'moura* (the cultivated) and the *barriyya* or *chol* (wilderness).[486] There were two large nomadic Arab tribes in the region: Shammar and Tayy. Their chiefs, Chorek and later Daham al-Hadi of the Shammars and Abdarrahman of the Tayy, used to own a residence and large plots of land in Nusaybin before the delimitation of the border. They used to collaborate with the urban notables of Mardin in local and regional affairs. During the French mandate era, they turned out to be the new landholders. They asked for the concessions of those villages which were bordering the Kurdish villages. Another Arab tribe, the Sharabiyyin, had some nomadic sections camping between the Khabur valley and north of Sindjar. A section of Sharabiyyin worked as agricultural labourers in the newly built villages in the French Jazira, while another section of the same tribe worked as shepherds for the sedentary population. The only Kurdish transhumant tribe living among the Arab tribes was the Kurdish nomadic tribes (Kur: Koçer) like the Miran tribe. The Kurdish tribe of Pınar Ali was originally from the south of Mardin, the Ghorss valley. The Kurdish tribe of Mersini was related to the Omeri tribe of the north and the Ramman tribe of the Tigris.

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[484] Martin Thomas, "Bedouin", p. 555.
[485] Circassians became established in the east of Ras al-Ain in 1876 and lived in the villages of Safeh and Tell Rouman. See Etienne de Vaumas, "La Djézireh", *Anneles de Geographie*, 65 (1956), p. 70
[486] The former denotes the land that borders the steppe proper, which receives between 200 and 250 mm of rain per annum, enough to support a settled population and dry agriculture. The *barriyya* is the central steppe, home of the nomadic population.

One of the most elaborate studies on the Bedouins in 1924 shows that their numbers were 225,000 out of a total population of 1,520,000. In 1930, their total population was estimated at around 130,000 individuals with 23,000 tents.[487] The French mandate authorities undertook several schemes in order first to pacify and then gradually to sedentarize the nomadic steppe population. These schemes varied from a Moroccan-style regime of "great *caids*" of General de Lamothe, to setting up a separate Bedouin state which resembled a closely supervised military zone directly under the authority of the Commander-in-Chief of the Levant Forces.[488] In accordance with the supposed insularity of the tribal culture, an administrative body outside the jurisdiction of the French civil administration, *Contrôle Bédouin*, was established to control and govern the Syrian Desert (*baadiyya*).[489] The option that the Bedouin should not be governed by a centralized Syrian authority, but that tribal disputes, tax payments and civil property cases should be judged by the *Contrôle Bedouin* according to tribal custom (a governing technique inspired by the French colonial experience in North Africa), was rejected more openly by the new HC Henry de Jouvenel in March 1926, for fear of adverse reaction from the urban Arab nationalists.[490]

First of all, the ultimate aim of sedentarisation and an increase in the amount of cultivated area inevitably brought the controversial land issue to the fore. In principle, the French authorities in Syria were in favour of small peasantry for economic, political and social reasons.[491] Accordingly, the registration of land ownership in a cadastre formed one of the priorities of the HC. The *Regie du Cadastre* was formed on 12 September 1923 (resolution 2191). On 12 November 1930 (resolution 3339) the Code of Immobile Property was issued. In 1938, only 3 million hectares of land, making up only a quarter of the Syrian territory, was surveyed and registered. One of the most significant changes in land ownership during the mandate rule was the regulation of the state lands. All the lands, except the *waqf* lands and private property—*mulk*—were reclaimed by the state. Afterwards, the state distinguished between public and private land, by decrees on 10 June 1925 (resolution no. 144) and 5 May 1926, respectively. It is this former domain, the public land, which was divided up, allotted or

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[487] Victor Müller, *En Syrie avec les Bedouins, Les Tribus du Désert*, (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1931).
[488] Christian Velud, "French Mandate Policy in the Syrian Steppe", p. 68.
[489] For a comparison between the British and French imperial control policies in the desert, see Martin Thomas, "Bedouin Tribes and the Imperial Intelligence Services in Syria, Iraq and Transjordan in the 1920s", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38, 4 (2004), pp. 539-561.
[490] Martin Thomas, "Bedouin", p. 556.
[491] M. Achard, "Les problèmes de l'agriculture syrienne: l'exploitation du sol et la main d'œuvre", *Bulletin Economique Trimestriel des Etats au mandat*, 1925, 2nd part, p. 101. For the land regulation under the mandate rule, see Nassib Boulos, *Legal Aspects of Land Tenure in Jordan and Syria* (Beirut: UNRWA, 1953).

rented, sold or leased.[492] However, these cadastre surveys did not cover the lands in any of the autonomously administrated Sanjaks, including the French Jazira. It was in 1947 that the first topographic survey was made in Jazira and it was only in 1950 that the full 31,245 hectares of the land was surveyed.[493]

Throughout the mandate period, two divergent views concerning the question of the sedentarization of nomads co-existed in a struggle for domination. One of these views approached sedentarisation as a "natural" process which follows the change in economic conditions. As an "expected" result of this "natural" process, the nomads would inevitably develop their own ways of surviving under the new situation. Since this view was also embraced by the HC, the French authorities attempted to transform the nomadic Bedouin into sedentary pastoralists so as to break the grip of powerful absentee landlords on the peasant sharecroppers.

The other view, which was more commonly upheld by the *Contrôle Bédouin* officers, argued that the sedentarisation would disaggregate the tribal organization and run up against the atavism of the nomads, which was assumed to survive only in the traditional pastoral life. Soon, the proponents of this perspective argued that the tribal leaders would claim their tribes' traditional grazing lands as their personal private property, in order to keep the newly settling population under their control, regardless of whether the nomad tribal leaders would sedentarize in the near future or not. They contended that the Bedouin population should *not* be forced to sedentarize and be viewed as the potential peasants within the ultimate plan for the *mise en valeur* of Jazira. Instead, the proponents of the second opinion argued that an equilibrium between agriculture and livestock farming should be formed by dividing the region into two: that of the Bedouin Arabs and that of the mountainous and sedentary Kurds. Against the "uncontrolled invasion" of the nomadic Arab tribes at the expense of the cultivated land, private property in land ownership should be introduced in the pastoral land of the former. Based on the idea of dissimilarity and conflict between the Arab nomads of the south and Kurdish mountaineers of the north, this policy intended to keep these two groups apart. It was proposed to transfer Arabs from other Syrian cities, such as Aleppo or Ghuta, were proposed to be transferred to Jazira to compensate for the under-population problem and

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[492] Nassib Bulos, *Legal Aspects*, p. 28.
[493] Roupen Boghossian, *La Haut Djezireh*, p. 126, and Roupen Boghossian, "Une région particulière, la Djézireh", *Mélanges d'économie Politique, Proche-Orientaux*, Université de Saint Joseph, Annales de la Faculté de Droit, 1956, pp. 241-289.

to avoid contact between the Arabs and the Kurds or nomads and the sedentary populations.[494] But, as mentioned above, such projects calling for seclusion were not realized.

However, both views agreed on the promotion of small peasantry and eventually turning the nomadic Bedouin into loyalist sedentary pastoralists. They recognised the unequal relations between the Arab nomad and the Kurdish sedentary, such that the former lives on the lands of the latter after the harvest, demands *khaoua* (tribute of friendship) or raises food supplies at times of need. This entanglement was the underlying reason, according to Terrier, for the arabisation of the Kurds. It formed the justification, according to Dillemann, for why the "sedentary individual(ized) peasant" should be protected against the "nomadic tribe member." Therefore, (colonial) state order was viewed as necessary for the newcomer sedentary populations' attachment to land, land cultivation and eventually multiplication of the number of villages. [495]

Another pro-small peasantry argument, yet against the forced sedentarisation of the nomads referred to the inherent clash of interests between the nomadic tribes, the sedentary tribes and the urban notables. Accordingly, the urban notables and the sedentary tribes would aim to open the land to agriculture and try to attract the peasants from "his tribe or his ethnic group,"[496] but would not favour paying any rental charges for the land imposed by the nomadic leader.[497] Thus, eventually the leader of the sedentary tribe or the urban notable would begin viewing the peasants as his serfs. The new peasant would eventually accept the "tribute" imposed on him, but would look for an "outside protector" in order to counter the "yoke of his landowner." The "new protector" would possibly be an urban trader, another tribal leader or an officer who would be likely to finance the peasant's "new exploitation" and defend his rights before the authorities.[498]

To that end, the major dilemma was between the maximization of the agricultural population for the *mise en valeur* of Jazira and sustaining the political status quo in the region in conformity with colonial interests. This dilemma became more apparent after the eventual delimitation of the Turco-Syrian and the Syrian-Iraqi borders and the pacification of the major tribes in the region, as the nomad question began to evolve into a national Syrian issue with

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[494] République Syrienne, "Rapport Générale de la Reconnaissance Foncière de la Djézireh", 1940, p. 35 and 39.
[495] Dillemann, [title], Velud, *Une Expérience*, p. 126.
[496] République Syrienne, "Rapport Générale de la Reconnaissance Foncière de la Djézireh", 1940, p. 29.
[497] Daham al-Hadi, leader of the Shammar al-Khorsa, used to take 3/20 of the harvest from his tenants. The Kurdish Mersini tribe used to pay less than this percentage [to whom?]. After 1937 the latter refused to pay the former [what is the latter, and what is the former? .
[498] Ibid. p. 29.

economic and political aspects. These two hindrances, one political and the other economic, prevented the adoption of a pure pro-small peasantry perspective.

The economic reason averting the pro-small peasantry policy was that the land which the nomadic groups would choose to settle would also be claimed by other sedentary tribal leaders or their factions—or, as mentioned above, these lands would also be claimed by the urban notables who would come up with some old title deeds. In this case, the tribal leader would usually get the ownership of the land and ask for a rent either from the intermediary urban notables or the new peasants. Indeed, this was usually the case in the French Jazira over the course of the French mandate period. The nomadic tribes did not settle in a definitive sense, but either a very limited section of the tribe turned to agriculture only for the immediate needs of the tribe, or, more often, the "outsiders," namely the Kurdish or Armenian refugee peasants, would cultivate the nomadic tribes' lands and pay a land-rent in return. The Shammar al-Khorsa usually employed Kurdish sharecroppers for their lands.[499] The Armenian sharecroppers worked on the lands of the nomadic Arab tribe Tayy, again paying 1/5 of the harvest in return.[500]

The political reason was that the colonial authorities were cautious not to destroy the nomadic organization violently and once for all, since destroying the authority of the tribal leader would bring about the destabilization of the tribal organization, which would lead to a greater security problem. The French had a real fear that "the Kurds abandoning their mountains and the Bedouin their steppe would gradually lead to the disappearance of the traditional tribal order, and the authority of the chief that is necessary for the conservation and defence of the tribe members would progressively pass on to the Arab nationalists."[501] They were anxious that the breakup of the tribal structure and transformation of the tribe members into poor sharecroppers would destabilize the security and the socio-political status quo. This is why the colonial authorities tried to maintain and favour the Bedouin hierarchy at all costs. Several legislative procedures were declared accordingly.[502]

The mandate authorities endeavoured to turn both the nomadic and semi-nomadic tribal leaders into privileged pro-French intermediaries in the desert. They tried to "protect" the Bedouin world from outside influences, in particular from the Syrian Arab nationalists, their extensions in British Iraq, and the sedentary populations in the north. Similar to the colonial

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[499] République Syrienne, "Rapport Générale de la Reconnaissance Foncière de la Djézireh", 1940, p. 34.
[500] Lalo and Agop, interview with the author, May 2006, Qamishli, Syria.
[501] Velud, *Une Expérience*, p. 562
[502] Velud, "Jezireh Syrienne", p. 173

policy of separating the minority-inhabited regions from inner Syrian towns of Muslim majority through granting the former a certain degree of administrative autonomy, the French authorities tried hard to prevent the Arab nationalist fervour from "contaminating" the nomads. To this end, they emptied the political prisons in Dayr al-Zor of all their nationalist detainees.[503] The inevitable effects of colonial modernization on the tribes created anxiety and fear among the French that the decrease in the authority of the chief would favour the nationalists.

Eventually, it was the tribal leaders who profited from the French distribution of public land, especially in the French Jazira. French collaboration with favoured sheikhs and village leaders left the agricultural land and the local instruments of administrative power in the hands of a few.[504] (Big landownership in Jazira and in other parts of Syria was to come to an end only with the land reforms in the independence period 1959-1964.) The old tribal leaders gradually emerged as the new landlords; Milli, Ghubur, Tayy and Hevêrkan approached landownership as a way to counter the loss of their authority after the disaggregation of traditional forms of life, as their old administrative, political, economic and social power was gradually being replaced by several village *mukhtar*s and small local chiefs. İbrahim Pasha Milli, the leader of the Kurdish Milli tribe, took possession of the lands to the west of Ras al-'Ayn. The Chechens who were settled to the south of Ras al-'Ayn at the end of 19th century appropriated vast plots of land on the banks of the Khabur River, between Ras al-Ayn and Hassaka. The Kurdish tribe Hevêrkan became the landholder to the south of Qamishli. The Kurdish tribes of Alian and Hasanan, the Ashitans (the tribes living in the east of Qamishli, the Ashiti region) , possessed the land in the east of the Djagh Djagh River towards the Tigris. As for the nomadic Arab tribes, it was especially the lands of the Arab tribe Tayy which were opened to agriculture thanks to the Armenian peasants working on their lands. The leader of the Tayy, Abd al-Mohsen, owned the villages in the west of the river Djgah Djagh.[505] Daham al-Hadi of Shammar owned Chill agha, close to Demir Qapu and several other villages in the eastern part of Qamishli.

In this sense, French mandate authorities in Beirut and the local SR officers in Jazira followed a dual and essentially contradictory policy. On the one hand, they heeded the advice of Père Poidebard by recognizing the authority of the tribal sheikhs and seeking the alliance of the tribal leaders and the notables of the region, in order both to control them and to be able

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[503] Velud, "French Mandate Policy in the Syrian Steppe", p. 70.
[504] Martin Thomas, "Bedouin Tribes", p. 540.
[505] CADN, Box 550, L. Dillemann, "Etude du Développement Economique, Kamishlié", Octobre 1931, p. 6.

to maintain order in the region through their mediation. In other words, in the absence of tangible state power in the region, French representatives played "more subtle games of compromise, bribery and conciliation" with the tribal leaders.[506] On the other hand, they also embraced a pro-small peasantry perspective and promoted it by building secluded and religiously homogonous villages for the Kurdish and the Christian refugees from Turkey. In the meantime, the newly delimited borders and the expansion of market forces in the recently founded colonial nation-state gradually accelerated the dissolution of tribal loyalties in favour of peasant sharecroppers. In parallel with the gradual increase in agricultural land and the decrease in grazing lands, the nomadic Arab tribes who had traditionally despised agriculture were retreating more to the south, while at the same time the tribal chiefs were being transformed into big landowners since they were renting their domains to the new villagers (Armenian, Yezidi and Kurdish) for cultivation.[507] As well as this, a new urban bourgeoisie was being formed thanks to the interruption in the cycle of nomadism that used to correspond to the trade routes of big seasonal caravans and bring the desert products to the urban centres in order to exchange them with manufactured goods for the tribe. The urban traders took over the task of dealing the desert products such as with wood, butter, wheat and sheep.

In brief, then, the French mandate authorities undertook the task of strengthening the power of pro-French tribal elites, fostered the empowerment of urban elites and simultaneously promoted small-peasantry through building secluded villages, distributing land or providing agricultural material to the new villagers. If the infrastructural measures—like building roads, extending the railroad from Nusaybin, Turkey and pluralizing economic centres in the region—addressed the general agricultural public, religion emerged as a key feature in the distribution of land or the organization of villages. This dual contradictory policy, arguably, laid the material ground for the emergence of a culture of sectarianism and elite-dominated sectarian rule in the French Jazira.

What the French SR officers hardly envisioned was the local interpretations of this "unequal and segregated colonial modernization" by the subaltern Jaziran actors during the coming years when the rules of the big colonial game began to change. That will be the subject of the next chapter. The next section discusses the process and the sociopolitical implications of the making of the countryside in the French Jazira in more detail.

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[506] Martin Thomas, "Bedouin Tribes", p. 546.
[507] Robert Montagne, "Quelques Aspects", p. 58.

Making of a the French Jazira and Sectarianism

The Countryside: Detribalization, New villages, Sectarianism

The French attempt at founding small towns and villages on a religious basis in order to attract refugees from Turkey and to counter the adverse effects of the loss of the traditional hinterland of High Jazira arguably formed the spatio-economic background to the emergence of an elite-dominated sectarianism in the French Jazira.

New villages were founded for refugees around the military posts in Hassaka, Qamishli and Ras al-'Ayn, preferably along the Khabur and Djagh Djagh Rivers. Founding villages by granting plots of land, free or at very low prices, out of the *terres domaniales* followed religious lines, despite the HC's cautious attitude about not adopting a "pro-minority policy." Tell Brak, Tell Abiad, Tell Beri and Tell Aswad were founded exclusively for the newcomer refugee Armenian peasants. These new "colons" were often composed of religiously homogenous groups; but mixed villages were not exceptions. There were several Kurdish and Christian mixed villages founded by the refugees themselves, with two *mukhtar*s, one Christian and one Kurdish. The foundation and development of several other new villages was more organic and spontaneous. Robert Montagne, the Director of the French Institute in Damascus between the years 1930 and 1938 attributed the formation of these villages to the arrival of the "Kurds of the mountains" with their tenant farmer Armenians and Yezidis.[508] There were already tens of Syriac villages to the east of Qamishli, in the Ashiti region, which used to have Tour 'Abdin as their centre. Towards Qubur al-bid (Kur: Tirbaspî) and to the south of Qamishli, there were Yezidi settlements by those who had arrived in the region from Urfa, Viranşehir or Tour 'Abdin. In less than five years, Qamishli had 28 villages, 48 hamlets and 29 isolated farms. If French colonial urban planning in the urban centres formed the backbone of a sectarian mode of organization—as will be demonstrated in the next section—these villages were their counterparts in the countryside. The climax of this sectarian settlement project was the settlement of Iraqi-Assyrians in 1933 on the eastern banks of the Khabur. Approximately 8,800 Iraqi Assyrians were settled along the Khabur River in Tell Tamer and Tell Massas.

In each newly-founded village in Frech-Jazira, vast amounts of land were given to two or three ex-legionnaire families, usually the Syrian Légionnaires recruited mostly among Syriacs, or the Assyrian levies or their remnants who arrived from Iraq, who would constitute

[508] Montagne, "Quelques Aspects", p. 58.

the nucleus of that village. The chiefs of the villages were all *sous-officiers* (non-commissioned officers) who were delegated to gather other refugee families around them.[509] Unfortunately, no information is available about the organization of these villages.

As far as the state-founded villages are concerned, at first hand, the mandate authorities decided to exploit the unutilized *mahlul* land (land left uncultivated for three years or less) and the *matruk* land (abandoned land). However, it proved not to be so easy to declare land as *mahlul* or *matruk*, as a claimant would immediately appear.[510] Several laws were issued and cadastre surveys were proposed in order to regulate the land ownership; however, most of these efforts usually remained futile. Thus, the mandate authorities began distributing the lands (and its concession) in the immediate surroundings of the newly-created urban centres. Garden-like small allotments were the first distributed lands. The land distribution in Hassaka started from the most fertile lands around the Khabur River and its tributaries. By promoting small agriculture in the suburbs, the French provided land both for the traditionally agricultural populations and for the small shop owners, traders and artisans who usually engaged in small-garden farming.

The law was immediately put in the service of the dominant power. The mandate authorities, or the French military authorities as their actual representatives in the region, referred to the regional Jaziran legislation, but not to the national Syrian one, in order not to arouse protest from the civil Syrian authorities or the local Syrian population. The administrative council in Dayr al-Zor was appointed responsible in the regulations concerning the concessions of the *mahlul* lands that were larger than thirty-seven dunam (Ar: donum) and situated around Hassaka, Ras al-'Ayn, Khabur and its tributaries.[511] Although this decision was only a decree (decision no. 339, 15 August 1922), it was given the status of a law. A committee was nominated by the Delegate of the High Commissariat in Dayr al-Zor. The members of the committee would be proposed by the *kaimakam* (district governor), but in all cases the committee would be led by the director of the SR of Hassaka. The other members of the committee would be the mayor of Hassaka, a government officer and an urban notable.[512] In addition to the laws and regulations that were invented to support the colonial project of *mise en valeur*, more political measures were also taken for recuperation and increasing the amount of state land to be distributed. In another proof of the dominance of the military

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[509] Velud, *Une Expérience*, p. 453.
[510] Ibid., p. 448.
[511] Ibid.
[512] Ibid., p. 449

authority over the civil authority in the French Jazira, the military authority had the right to ask for land from the municipalities for military purposes—for military landing areas, barracks and so on. As well as this, certain lands could also be registered in the name of certain philanthropic organizations such as Central Committee of Refugees, in which case the committee would be entitled to distribute certain plots of land to refugees in need. The above-mentioned *comité* headed by Père Poidebard was very active particularly in the establishment of Armenian quarters or villages all over northern-Syria.

Three other refugee villages were founded in the outskirts of Hassaka, along the bank of the Khabur River. In general, the initial land clearing (*defrichement*) was made in those lands which were away from the newly-built agglomerations in order to be able to restrain the ambitions of the neighbouring population.[513] The lands in the immediate surroundings of the urban centres were usually left fallow. Thus, the amount of cleared land in Jazira was always greater than the land under cultivation.

The project of bringing the Upper Khabur valley under cultivation was also sponsored by the military authority in accordance with their policy of welcoming refugees. It was recommended by Père Poidebard as well, in his detailed reports in 1927 and 1929.[514] In his report dated 1929, he proposed the exploitation of the Upper Khabur valley through small or medium size agriculture and peopling the region with Christian refugees. His advice was followed only after 1936.

The founding of new villages along the border for the settlement of Christian and Kurdish groups and appointment of a co-religionist as the *mukhtar* were surely a novel phenomenon, which implied a radical shift in social and political subjectivities and local power relations. It had two immediate consequences. Firstly, the new settlement pattern in the newly founded villages restructured the economic relations in/between the groups. In particular, the head of the new village, the *mukhtar*, gained a new social and political significance. Secondly, religious affiliation, especially belonging to the Catholic sect, started to play a key role in the distribution of economic resources—, to be sure, not in an absolute sense, but definitely in a way that had never been the case previously.

In the past, prior to their arrival in the French Jazira, the *mukhtar*s and the managers (*gérants*) living in the rural centres were the intermediaries between the urban landholder (*mellak*) and the Kurdish, Armenian, Yezidi or Syriac peasants. The former's residence used to have feudal characteristics. Every year the land of the village was divided equally between

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[513] Velud, "Régime de terres et structures", p. 175.
[514] For the irrigation of the High-Khabur valley, see Poidebard. The electric pumps were erected only in 1936.

the peasants with the consent of the *mukhtar*. If the peasant was without any resources, then the urban landowner would give a certain amount of money in advance, which in that case the harvest and the herds would be divided between the peasant and the landowner at the minimum rate. If the peasant was only able meet the exploitation of the land, he had to give 1/16 of the grains, 1 piaster (Ar: *qurush*) per *oke* (Ar: *okkiyya*) of butter,[515] and 1 piaster per sheep fleece to the *mukhtar*. Eventually, it turned out to be the peasant who paid the tithe (Ar: '*ushr, pl.'ashar*) and the landowner who acquired the profit (Ar: *tamattu'*).[516]Actually, the peasant was usually indebted during the year and, thanks to the usurer who used to give loans with an interest rate of 30 to 40 per cent, the *mukhtar/gérant* had augmented his profits. The administrative authority, usually the *mukhtar*, used to reinforce his power and defend his personal interest through keeping the farmers in a tight dependency relationship. In some bigger villages, there were usually two or three *mukhtar*s representing two or three different landowners. However, among the nomadic Arab tribes such as the Tayy, ownership of the land next to the steppe had always belonged to the entire group. Every year it was divided between the chiefs of the families/factions under the authority of the sheikh of the tribe. The latter received the ground-rent/royalty fee (*redevance*). Moreover, the chiefs of the factions used to hold all the lands around the rivers or valleys where they employed the Christian Jacobites, Kurds, and Armenians as farmers for the cultivation of rice, tobacco and vegetables.[517]

Massacres, displacement and the socio-economic dimension of the making of the French Jazira paved the way for the gradual dissolution of the tribal structure. The speed, influence and experience of modern transformation, i.e. detribalization, was different in each tribe depending on several factors. In the French Jazira, the tribes in the Qamishli region underwent an earlier transformation than those in the east around Derik and Ain Diwar.[518] The transformation also held true for the Christian peasants who were relatively loosely tied to a tribal structure, for instance the Syriac peasants of Tour 'Abdin, and several other Armenian, Yezidi and Kurdish peasants. Gradually this multi-ethnic and multi-religious rural population became dispersed as they came to play a new role as sharecroppers on the lands of the big landowners, the Arab or Kurdish tribal leaders. Upon their settlement in the French Jazira, these refugee peasants had to negotiate the necessary economic and social arrangements with

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[515] Oke (Fr: *ocque*) is a weight unit used in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt; it is equal to 1,283 gr.
[516] We do not have knowledge about to whom (the muktar, the landowner or to the state) the peasant paid the tithe.
[517] Robert Montagne, "Quelques Aspects", p. 59-60.
[518] Pierre Rondot, "Les Tribus Montagnardes de l'Asie Antérieure", pp. 11-13.

the chief of the tribe, namely their new landlords in whose land they were settled. Usually 40 to 50 per cent of the harvest was yielded to their new landholder.[519] For instance, the Ashiti peasants and the members of the Omeri and Hevêrkan, from diverse religious origins, who used to be farmers and cultivators having the usufruct right, had recently become either *muraba'aci* or *khammasci*, getting one fourth or one fifth of the harvest in the lands of a new tribal leader/landholder, respectively.[520] The local authorities distributed plots of land to the Armenians and Kurdish peasants, especially to those who lived around the urban centres and close to the rivers.

Thanks to the French embracement of colonial developmentalism, the detribalization through the gradual replacement of cadres and fractions of the tribes by the *mukhtar*s or urban notable landowners having the colonial state as the primary political reference was celebrated by several SR officers. Montagne, for instance, favoured the blossoming of recently founded small urban centres playing the role of future social and administrative centres in the region as the formation of a bourgeoisie in Jazira constituted by the notables of the tribes, Christian or Kurdish landowners and Damascene officers.[521] He stated that "the new social formation which is built on the ruins of the tribes springs in the villages. The link uniting people to each other is formed by money. The *mukhtar*-money lenders [usurers] and the urban landholders are supported by the government against the Kurdish and Arab tribal leaders whose authority was measured on the basis of their armed tribal members."[522] He envisioned that "rural suburbs peopled by diverse people are going to develop around these urban centres and the urban elites will exert their economic, intellectual and religious domination on these people who used to live under the rebellious tribes of the steppes and the mountains."[523] Père Poidebard, too celebrated this change from "mixed villages and tribal rule to small villages headed by mukhtars from the same religion."

The wishful thinking of these SR officers was not realized, though. As mentioned in the previous section, the old tribal leaders usually turned out to be the new landowners and the peasants could not escape from material and social dependency to an urban intermediary or the new landowner, i.e. the old tribal chef. The cases where the peasant bought a certain plot

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[519] Rouben Boghossian, "Une Région Particulière, La Djézireh", *Mélanges d'économie Politique, Proche-Orientaux*, Université de Saint Joseph, Annales de la Faculté de Droit, 1956, pp. 263-265.
[520] In the *muraba'aci*, the landowner provides the funds, the livestock and the seed. The peasant only brings his/her labour. The landowner receives one fourth of the harvest. In the *khammasci*, the peasant brings his own seed and livestock as well. See Boghossian, "Une Région Particulière, La Djézireh", p. 129.
[521] Ibid, p. 65.
[522] Robert Montagne, "Quelques Aspects", p. 64.
[523] Ibid.

of land from the landholder tribal chief were extremely rare. Instead, Pierre Rondot's foresight that "French appointing an energetic *mukhtar* for each agglomeration—a loose social organisation [unlike the "rigidness" of the tribal organization] might be susceptible to assure the tranquillity" came out to be true, but in an unforeseeable way.[524] As the socioeconomic relations in the village were being radically transformed, the increasing significance of the *mukhtar-gérant* gained another dimension. In cases where he took the support of the local authority, he would declare himself an autonomous chief. The following words of a *mukhtar* to a French SR officer can be seen as a proof of the contested political and economic aspirations in the French Jazira:

> Give me the gendarmes and let me be involved in collecting the taxes of my villages.[525]

The Urban Scene: *Le Paradis à l'Ombre des Sabres*

Maintaining the Security Through the 'Staunch Agent'

As demonstrated above, the French mandate authorities relied on a system of security intelligence and Bedouin levies alongside the active cooperation of certain tribal groups to achieve compliance and effectively manage the nomad populations. As for the imperial control of the urban centres, the SR officers in the French Jazira heavily relied on the Christian refugees from Turkey both for security and in the administration of the newly founded urban centres. This was not much different from the French officers in other parts of Syria who felt more at ease with the Christian minorities despite being committed anticlericalists. Syriacs were especially overrepresented in the local security forces and the military, as Armenians were not allowed to take up arms due to the restrictions enforced by the Turkish authorities on the other side of the border.[526] Ethnic and religious criteria in the process of recruitment to the local security forces and the French army was another facet of

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[524] Pierre Rondot, "Les Tribus Montagnardes de l'Asie Antérieure", p. 11.
[525] Robert Montagne, "Quelques aspects", p. 59.
[526] Nevertheless, it was quite common among the Armenians to change their names to Aramaic names so to be recruited into the French army and get a regular salary.

the French divide and rule policy which, at the same time, contributed to the formation of a communal/national sense of being.[527]

The colonisation of the Upper Jazira was spearheaded with the creation of the "Assyro-Chaldean" military units, otherwise called *8ème Bataillon du Levant (BDL)*. Velud argues that "the history of this battalion epitomizes the history of French Jazira and its cities between the two World Wars."[528] It was in September 1920 that the first military unit was formed in Alexandretta under French occupation. The first Assyrian detachment, *companie Assyrienne*, was composed of two units and consisted of 143 soldiers.[529] Despite the fact that the British in Iraq opposed the recruitment of Iraqi Assyro-Chaldeans in the French army, the French authorities were gripped by the "warrior characters" of these Christians. They brought the Assyrian refugees from Caucasia to be recruited into the French army with a French ferry from Batum.[530] Robert de Caix even proposed bringing the Cilician Armenians, who were preparing to leave for Armenia, to serve in the local security forces in the French Jazira.[531] The first Assyrian detachment was mainly composed of Assyrians from Caucasia. The second one was created at Dayr al-Zor in 1921, with the hope of recruiting Assyrians from Iraq. These two detachments were joined in 31 March 1922 to form the 11th company of the 2nd regiment of the *Légion Syrienne*, based in Dayr al-Zor. The voluntary Assyrians were turned over to the *Légion Syrienne*; nevertheless, most of its soldiers were Syriacs from Mardin.[532] In April 1923 the regional centre for military recruitment was transferred to Hassaka, a small village at the time. Moving between Dayr al-Zor and Hassaka, the *Legion* finally settled in the latter on 15 May 1925 and was named the *3ème Compagnie du 6ème BDL*. From then on, it became the sole security force for Hassaka and its peoples. Not only that, but also it took part in all the urban development projects, even in the production of bricks to be used for the buildings in the villages of Hassaka. It was meant to be responsible for every aspect of defence, including the upkeep and construction of the nascent villages.

The ethnic profile of the soldiers in the Assyro-Chaldean unit in 1926 revealed that 149 out of 168 soldiers were indeed Christians, mostly Assyro-Chaldeans from the Turkish territories bordering Syria. 34 of them were from Caucasia; and there were only 11 Muslims,

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[527] N.E. Bou-Nacklie, "Les Troupes Spéciales: Religious and Ethnic Recruitment, 1916–46", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (1993), pp. 645–52. Martin Thomas, "French Intelligence-Gathering in the Syrian Mandate, 1920-40", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 38, 1 (2002), pp. 1-32.
[528] Velud, *Une Expérience d'Administration*, Vol. 3, p. 466.
[529] Tachjian, , *La France en Cilicie et en Haut-Mésopotamie*, p. 319.
[530] Ibid., p. 320.
[531] Ibid., p. 320.
[532] Velud, *Une Expérience* , p. 467. 104 new legionnaires, mostly Syriacs from Mardin, joined on 16 November 1922. In 1923, 50 new legionnaires from Mardin and Midyat were added onto them.

1 from Ourmia (Iran), 1 from Urfa and 9 from Dayr al-Zor.[533] The soldiers of the Assyrian detachment joined the newly-arrived Christian soldiers where they formed a new battalion in March 1928 in Hassaka.[534] After this date, the 6ème and 7ème BDL became responsible for security and order in the French Jazira. They took part in the French occupation of the most eastern stretch of Jazira, the so-called Bec de Canard (Duck's Beak), in 1930. In March 1930, the 8ème BDL was created and it incorporated the Christian and Assyro-Chaldean units of the 6ème and 7ème BDL.[535]

The prospect of becoming a French soldier was one of the most important reasons underlying the continuous flow of the impoverished Syriac population in Tour 'Abdin, Turkey to the French Jazira. The immigration of the family usually depended on and was mediated by one of its young male members who, after crossing the border clandestinely, would submit his service to the closest French military force to be a French soldier. Following medical checks in Hassaka, the regional centre for military recruitment, and acceptance as a legionnaire, he would send a note to his family in Tour 'Abdin to pass into Syria, again clandestinely. This pattern was the most common one, especially after the 1930s, and it increased exponentially until the 1940s.

The military units in Derik and Qamishli had a Kurdish battalion, too.[536] The renowned Kurdo-Armenian singer Xarabet Xaço (Garabet Haçaduryan) was one of those French soldiers. However, up until 1936 the Assyro-Chaldean compagnie in Hassaka was formed exclusively of Christians. It was Captain Malkisadaq (*Qumandan Melki* in local usage), an Assyro-Chaldean who joined the 3ème compagnie of 8ème BDL in 1922 and became a lieutenant and a captain in 1925 and 1928 respectively, whose name became synonymous with the military recruitment of the newly arriving Syriac population in Jazira. His name stands as one of very few that are still remembered among the ex-legionnaires in the Syrian Jazira today. That he installed the two big Assyrian antique figures in the bas-relief of a still standing tower in Hassaka is not part of the popular memory, but his name is mentioned in the historical narratives about the advantages of being a French soldier in contrast to the "cursed-life" in Turkey.

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[533] CADN, Syrie-Liban, Cabinet Politique, Box 550, no. 2449, Nationalité des auxiliaires de la 3cie du 6. Bataillon du Levant, Représentant du Haut Commissaire a Haut Commissaire Beyrouth, Service de Renseignements du Levant, Alep, 20 September 1928,
[534] Velud, *Une Expérience* , p. 468.
[535] Ibid.
[536] Velud argues that he could not find any documents supporting the presence of a separate Kurdish battalion. My interviewees do not refer to such a practice, either. Nevertheless, according to Tejel, based on an official report elaborated in 1943, the constitution of a Kurdish battalion was one of the measures of the Terrier Plain. Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, p. 29.

The name of the Assyro-Chaldean Unit (*caysh Ashuri* in local usage) was protested by the Syriac Orthodox bishop of Jazira, Kuriakus, on the grounds that the Syriacs formed the majority in the battalion, yet the battalion was named after the (Catholic) Assyro-Chaldeans, who formed only a minority group in the whole unit.[537] This protest was indeed an early manifestation of the power struggle between the privileged pro-French Catholic clergy and the relatively disfavoured Syriac-Orthodox clergy. The latter protested against the rapid rapprochement between Captain Malkisadaq and the Syriac Catholic priest of Hassaka, Hebbé, who was also one the most fervent supporters of the French rule and one of the pioneers of the autonomy movement in Jazira (1936-1939). Captain Malkisadaq, and most probably his ambitious plans, would soon be harshly contested by the Assyrian notables.[538]

Apart from the security issue, another grave problem in the region was the insufficiency of the lands available for cultivation (*defrichément*) to meet the demands of the existing refugees and also to encourage newcomers. This was an acute problem especially in Hassaka starting from the end of the 1920s. One of the most immediate reasons of the stagnation in Hassaka was the foundation of Qamishli in 1925, which resulted in the flow of a considerable number of merchants to the latter. Given the extreme poverty of the newcomers and the high land prices, the majority of the refugees were able to buy only a small piece of land in Hassaka for small scale agriculture. The same problem would be expected in Qamishli soon, due to its poor climate and malaria-infested Djagh Djagh River.

One of the ways, then, the colonial state tackled this dual problem was through creating "agro-soldiers." These agro-soldiers would be billeted in separate and secluded quarters in the newly-founded city centres. This military structure, formed exclusively of Christians, was portrayed by the local French officers as an "indispensable guarantee" for the livelihood and security of both the urban centres and the vast agricultural centres. Besides this, it was assumed that the agro-soldier project would encourage coreligionists in Turkey to flee towards the French Jazira. Thanks to Père Poidebard, the colonial state would both be able to infuse and consolidate its power through creating an infrastructure that would attract more military recruits from the refugee Christians and settle them permanently:

> The security question is of fundamental importance to the stability of the refugee centres. From a military point of view, Hassaka is indispensable as a centre for the policing and the defence of Upper Jazira and also as a recruiting station. Here Assyro-Chaldean mountain people and mountain people from Jabal Tour, immigrants to French-mandated territory, can be recruited for the Syrian Legion. To encourage these excellent recruits, their loyalty should be rewarded with

[537] Velud, *Une Expérience*, p. 474.
[538] Ibid, p. 475.

> generous pay. Experienced officers and professional soldiers who know the area should be retained and each company should be well provided with local reservists. To this end it will probably be both advisable and necessary to grant land, in one form and another, to military families. This method of guarding the border lands would echo what took place in the same area under the Roman Empire. From the middle of the 3rd century AD surveillance of the frontier was entrusted to a special division which comprised both soldiers and settlers. A piece of land was granted to them in the border area and they were responsible both for cultivating and defending it. It was hoped that they would serve the empire with greater loyalty if at the same time they were defending their own personal property.[539]

The French settlement policy vis-à-vis the Armenian refugees in secluded neighbourhoods, in "*le banlieue immediate de la ville*," in particular in Aleppo, gives a clue to the commonalities between the refugee policy in the French Jazira and the rest of Syria. In his study of the Armenian refugees in Aleppo, Watenpaugh argues that the French refugee policy in the early 1930s was based on "integrating the refugees into modern urban society as members of what French policy members identified as the 'respectable middle classes'."[540] The words of French High Commissioner Ponsot, during a meeting of the Central Committee for Refugee Aid in Beirut on 24 June 1931, resonated with and were informed by similar political concerns with the above words of Père Poidebard:

> "It is necessary to help the refugees primarily to establish them permanently … With the Armenians what one fears is that as soon as they have a little savings, they will wish to go elsewhere. This must be avoided and to avoid it, we must make them small property owners, of a house, of a land, of a field."[541]

In Jazira, small plots of land and gardens were distributed to the married soldiers in the *Légion Syrienne*, then to the veterans who would afterwards form the reservists and most importantly to the agro-soldiers of the *Legion Syrienne* for the social housing project. Indeed, the social housing project for the agro-soldiers brought the land ownership problem to the fore, as the lands to be opened for agricultural or urban housing estate (*lotissement*) were not free-floating. Accordingly, the land given to the French army for the building of the legionnaire quarter in Hassaka was provided by the municipality free of charge. It was located close to the military post just outside a village very close to the Djagh Djagh River. By 1930, 120 houses had been built in the new quarter of legionnaires in Hassaka thanks to the subsidies provided by the *General Commandant Superior des Troupes Françaises du Levant*.

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[539] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Fonds Beyrouth, Box 571, Rapport du Père Poidebard du 6.01.1928 sur la situation des Réfugiés en Haute Jézireh en Octobre 1927p. 11.
[540] Watenpaugh, *Being Modern*, p. 289.
[541] CADN, Fonds Beyrouth, Cabinet Politique, Box 575, Comité de Secours aux Refugiés Armeniens, proces verbal, 24 June 1931, cited in Watenpaugh, *Being Modern*, p. 288.

In the same year, the garrison in Hassaka was composed of 380 auxiliary soldiers, all of them refugees and 250 of them married.

The "colonial-welfare state" granted 800 francs housing-credit to the married legionnaire soldiers of the *Légion Syrienne*. Each family was supposed to build his own house, with his own labour. (The daily wage of a soldier was 8.50 francs in 1930.)[542] The subsidies were destined to be spent on the beams, doors and windows. Each family was to receive 20 x 30m of land. The houses were separated from each other with a walled courtyard. A small area of land measuring 30 x 50m on the banks of the Djagh Djagh River was set aside for every forty families for market gardening. The houses were lined along the large road, cutting the road perpendicularly. The houses were made of brick and the bricks were coated with kaolin to protect against the heavy rains of the Jaziran winters. The interior of the house was coated with lime. Having the same door and window forms with garden walls high enough to give tranquillity to each household, the houses symbolized the French colonial modernity which aimed to change the "indigènes" away from traditional dwelling habits towards a "modern" way of life. With the rest of the subsidies, a model farm was formed on a 13 hectare land. The farm was entrusted to a non-commissioned officer. He was given only woods and the land, and would build the house himself; his small-holding was supposed to form an example to the others.

Père Poidebard stated that "the moral results of these habitations which provided healthy and normal family conditions for all" were direct and the same for all.

> The legionnaires endowed with a house sometimes go to a café or go for a walk on the roads of these estates. Hardly able to leave their job in the casern, they take a break in the casern itself while fixing their household. In the evenings, they meet in groups and make house visits. From a financial perspective, all the salary is spent for the house instead of rapidly disappearing in the cafés or in gambling. On Sundays, the commander of the sector inspects the soldier's weekly work and the military doctor watches over the general hygiene of the soldiers and their families. In the courtyard, legionnaires in their uniforms stand next to the others in their ancient costumes that they used to wear in the mountain [Jabal Tour]. This scene presents a sound and intimate atmosphere in total. The refugee aspect of their lives has disappeared and is replaced by a normal and well-off atmosphere.[543]

Rightly, the colonial urbanization project concerning these agro-soldiers—who had been gathered from "twenty different geographical locations" and had been subject to different relations of domination—levelled them by ordering their lives through recruitment, the same religious holidays (of both the Catholic and the Orthodox rites) and so on. Velud, too,

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[542] Velud, *Une Expérience* ,p. 401.
[543] CADN, Fonds Beyrouth, Box 546, rapport du Père Poidebard, "La situation des refugies de Haute Djézireh en novembre 1929".

analyzes the agro-soldier housing project in the same colonial line of thinking as Père Poidebard and argues that "the *lotissement* secured a better adaptation for these newly recruited Christians."[544] However, Velud does not adopt a critical approach about what "adaptation" meant or what it implied for the "non-adapted." More importantly, Velud does not elaborate on how the discourse of "adaptation" was employed by the "adapteds" as a tool of self- or communal empowerment.

"*Le paradis à l'ombre des sabres*"[545] (Paradise in the shade of the sabres) is perhaps the best motto that praised the (Christian) guardians of the city as the pioneers of the (Western) civilization. The religious reference and the fact that it was written in French single out and legitimize the colonial French rule and the religiosity that it was embedded in. The memories of today's Jaziran Christians still hold on to their pioneering role in the opening up the uncultivated land; but they have replaced the colonial religiosity with the Ba'th Arab nationalist religiosity. One of my interviewees, the former director of one of the best private Syriac schools in Aleppo, is the daughter of one these ex-French legionnaires (originally from Qal'at al-Mar'a in Mardin). Now in her 70s, she told me her nostalgic memories of the agro-soldier neighbourhood as follows:

> Hassaka was like a dream to my mum. (*mama*). There was a Christian atmosphere, there was security. Everyone was Christian. Everyone behaved freely there. All together they used to go to the Khabur river for washing clothes. They used to sing together on the banks of the river. There was trust in the French except during the feast days when the French soldiers became drunk and knocked on our doors. We were afraid then, but other than that thanks to the French we embraced and adopted certain modern attitudes such as food, language, culture, enlightenment, equality, gastronomy, education, hygiene and so on.[546]

This is indicative of the relief and ease that was felt following the anguish of compulsory displacement from the home towns of Turkey for Hassaka; a regular salary and a dwelling as a legionnaire in an extremely homogonous city was literally "a dream," a novel habitat which was hardly imaginable back in their old home of Qal'at al-Mar'a. However, the "generosity of the colonizer" was designed to provide them with security by spatializing the community defined on the basis of its religion within the borders of a homogonous neighbourhood. Settling the refugees in separate neighbourhoods under certain occupations reinforced both the uniqueness of the Christian refugees in Jazira and a commitment to exchange their support for French interests in the region. This colonial policy of the late 1920s and early 1930s was strongly bound to the French political aim of increasing the Christian population and its

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[544] Ibid. 452.
[545] Velud states that this inscription was erected in the entrance of all the cities where battalion units existed.
[546] Josephine, interview with the author, March 2005, Hassaka, Syria.

political participation in order to suppress the political power of the National Bloc in Syria. Watenpaugh argues that the formation of this new segregated physical and social space "bound the Christian refugees to an idealized middle class modernity and made a complete break with the Ottoman structures of complete subordination, but also the Sunni Muslim Arabic speaking majority."[547] His analysis is relevant for the Jaziran-Christian refugees, with the minor nuance that the Jaziran Christians were intended to be made into "rural middle classes." The Jaziran Christians' memories, then, speak to this "colonial-transformation" and negotiate the terms of its making.

The legionnaires' quarter has survived up until the present, though the sign "Le paradis à l'ombre des sabres" is no longer there, nor are its old inhabitants. As a result of their upward social mobility, they have moved to middle-class neighbourhoods of Aleppo, Damascus and Beirut, or cities in Sweden, Holland, France, Germany or Canada. Some of them joined the ranks of the French army as soldiers in World War Two. Some have been transferred to the Syrian army. It is the urban sites in which the Christian refugees were made more visible and transformed into mobilized yet rigidly ordered political communities by the French local officers and the elites of the communities. It is to the urban setting that we now turn.

"Dewlet Xiristîyan e": A Christian State or the Christians' State?

Despite the fact that the French Jazira, arguably, enjoys certain aspects which can be considered of French design—albeit a haphazard and incoherent design—the French (indirect) colonial role in the making of Jazira is neutralized and reduced to a minor, incidental fact, if not completely rejected in the mainstream writing and memories of the Jaziran Christians today. As mentioned above, my interlocutors ignore the historical context of the mandate years. They compare the French colonial project of transforming the region into the French Jazira to the "negligible and passive"[548] Syrian presence in Lebanon until 2005. The colonial agency "in the blossoming prosperity" of Jazira, as referred both by today's locals and the mandate officers of 1930s is silenced and transferred to the self-made community (*al-taifa*) against a background of generous fatherly Arabs. Indeed, the above-mentioned role of the labour granted to the *Legion* members in the making and sustaining of

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[547] Watenpaugh, *Being Modern*, p.291.
[548] al-Ciran, May 2006, interview with the author, Qamishli, Syria.

the city seems to justify the agency-claims of today's Syriac community. However, today's Syriac establishment discourse silences their *protégé* status and de-politicizes the making of the community, separating it from the underlying colonial politics without which they would hardly be one of the "makers" of the region.

By contrast, the same period is usually referred to as the "*Dewleta Xiristîyan"* (En: the Christian state) by elderly Jaziran Kurds. The description continues as follows:

> The state was theirs, the state was Christian [Kurdish: *Dewlet dewleta wan e, Dewlet Xiristîyan e.* Ar: *dawla minnun, dawla masihi, al-dawla kanat ilun*].

At first sight, this labeling seems to point solely to the formal French colonial rule and the colonial agency which the Christians usually tend to de-emphasize. However, a deeper analysis suggests that the term *Christian* actually refers to the local practices of the hegemonic colonial rule that privileged the *local Christians* in several different aspects and spheres of life. It refers to the colonial mechanisms that underlie the Christian visibility (and, indirectly, Kurdish invisibility) in Jazira. It implies that the mandate period was the time during which the local Christians formed the hegemonic group in Jazira. That is to say, the phrase "the state was theirs" implied that they were "state-like."

Ironically enough, while the same Kurdish interlocutors' description of the border regime evokes freedom "due to the absence of the state," the same people recall the mandate period per se as "the Christian state" (*Dewleta Xiristîyan*). The "maltreatment of Kurds by the Christians" forms the plot of the "Dewleta Xiristîyan" narrative.

> As soon as they [the Christians] arrived in Jazira, they put a red tarbush on their heads. They used to beat us; they used to curse at us, they used to torture us wherever they met us. They told us that they were taking revenge for the Christian atrocities of the *ferman* days … The French provoked them, too. Actually the French wanted to establish a Christian state here. But we are Muslims.

In this sense, the Kurdish label of "Dewleta Xiristîyan" divulges that there was a French-sponsored Christian visibility particularly in the urban space in Jazira rather than a simple literal colonial/foreign French presence. The labelling reveals the social and political dynamics reproducing the unequal power relationships prevailing in Jazira under the French mandate rule. It speaks to this very inequality. It evokes memories of discrimination against and exclusion of the Kurds.

Still, the Kurdish phrase "Dewleta Xiristîyan" conflates the whole mandate period into one exclusive label and simplifies the complex reality on the ground, thus it needs to be nuanced both time-wise and along the countryside–urban axis.

Time-wise, one has to wait until the early 1930s to be able to distinguish the manifestations of a social segregation and a visible "Christianization" of the urban space. Jazira was still in a state of flux between 1922 and 1929, during which time the Christian and Kurdish refugees were flowing, destitute, into the region. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, French local officers were still leading reconnaissance tours, trying to negotiate with the Arab and Kurdish tribal leaders' submission to the new mandate rule. Social, economic and cultural differentiation between different ethnic and religious groups of refugees was still not discernible. Several of the refugees initially living under tents and gradually building houses made up of straw and dried mud, relied on smuggling and small shops selling smuggled products from Turkey. The old tribal, regional and local networks were detrimental in the economic activities prevailing in the region, the most common of which was smuggling. Thanks to the still open Turco-Syrian border and the encouragement of smuggling by the French, the number of small shops along the Baghdad railway increased remarkably.[549]

The Christian population was usually concentrated in the urban centres. The Christians formed 71 per cent of the urban population in the French Jazira, while they formed only one fourth of the rural population.[550] The population figures per city were as follows: The Christians formed 78% of the urban population in Qamishli, 76% in Hassaka and 77% in Tigris. The Kurds formed the majority of the rural population in Qamishli and Tigris as well as the majority in the overall governorate of Jazira with 41%. The Kurds comprised 75% of the total population (both urban and rural) of Qamishli, 13% in Hassaka and 73% in Tigris. The Arabs were the majority in Hassaka with 63% and formed 34.5% of the total population in the overall governorate.

Nevertheless, Velud's claim that the *noyau majoritaire* of the urban population was formed of Christians from Anatolia, while "Islam largely dominated the rural scene," should be approached with caution in order not to fall into the dichotomy of urban, middle-class Christian vs. rural, wild Islam.[551] His claim actually resonates with the colonial discourse of the time, a discourse accompanied by all sorts of orientalist clichés. However, the reality on the ground falsifies his claim. As shown in the first chapter, most of the Christians of the region shared a common habitus, lingua franca, life style and so on in their pre-Syrian lives. Furthermore, such a dichotomy obscures and underestimates the deliberate French efforts to

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[549] Velud, "L'émergence et l'organisation", p. 90.
[550] The Christian category comprised a subcategory called Kurdo-Chretiennes, or *les Kurdes de la religion Chretienne*, referring to the Syriacs from Tour Abdin, who, paradoxically enough, in present-day Syria embrace by far the strictest anti-Kurdish discourse.
[551] Velud, "L'émergence et l'organisation", p. 93.

turn these refugees into lower-class urban Christians and gain their loyalty in return. The military recruitment and related housing policy discussed in the previous section was one such effort; land distribution and the refugee policy were others. The following pages will be about the colonial developments of the urban centres since the 1930s. These urban centres may also be approached as sites through which the colonial mechanisms that "Christianize" the urban and "ruralize" Islam can be viewed. The colonial politics of difference and its local translations in Jazira would pave the way to un-envisioned inequalities and violent encounters between the Kurds and the Christians of Jazira in the very near future—that is, in the mid 1930s.

Hassaka, the capital city of the Sanjak of Jazira was founded in 1922 on the ancient Ottoman garrison. Built on the intersection point of the Khabur and Djagh Djagh rivers, it expanded rapidly thanks to the Christian population arriving from Mardin. In the beginning of 1925, there were 779 inhabitants in the city.[552] The French foundation of Hassaka was a significant step in the reorganization of the regional economy. It encouraged the shift of economic activity away from Turkey and towards the south, the the French Jazira. Hassaka became the administrative centre and governorate of the Sanjak. In 1932, the population of Hassaka reached 6,000, of which 5,700 were Christians.[553] Ras al-'Ain was founded in 1922 along the Baghdad railway, coming from Aleppo and passing through Jarablus and Tall Abyad. Almost 80 km away from Hassaka, it resembled more a market city rather than a major agricultural borough, where traders from both sides of the border used to come for exchange of goods. Derbassiyya (Kur: Dirbêsî) and Amouda (Kur: Amûdê) were founded in 1930 after the setting-up of a gendarme post by Captain Terrier and Captain Bonnot in 1926. The cities of Derik (Kur: Dêrik) and 'Ain Diwar (Kur**:** Eyndîwer) were founded in 1930 following the occupation of "*Bec du Canard*." Their establishment aimed to counter Jazira ibn 'Umar (Cizre) on the Turkish side. However, the most significant of all was the foundation of Qamishli (Kur: Qamişlo) on 3 August 1926 at just 1.5 km from Nusaybin. Situated in the intersection point of the Djagh Djagh valley between Turkey and Iraq, the population of Qamishli grew rapidly, from 3,000 people in 1927 to 7,500 in 1932.[554]

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[552] MAE, Levant 1918-1940, Syrie-Liban, Vol. 298, mémoire préparé par Poidebard, inutile, "la Haute Djézireh (notes de voyage)", June 1925, Beyrouth, pp. 162-3.
[553] CADN, Syrie-Liban, Cabinet Politique, Box 576, rapport inutile, "Situation des refugies en Haute Djézireh, Avril 1932", fait par le Père Poidebard et envoyé au médecin général Jude, directeur du service santé, hygiène et œuvres social du haut Commissariat a Beyrouth, 25 April 1932, Beyrouth, p. 1.
[554] CADN, m. Syrie-Liban, 1er versement, Box 576, rapport inutile, "Situation des réfugies en Haute Djézireh, avril 1932", p. 1.

The urban centres did not have an autonomous administration; instead, the governorate (*muhafaza*) and the municipality (*baladiyya*) were put under the same jurisdiction. The municipal council was headed by the governor. This gave the colonizers power to appoint Francophile governors and mayors and eventually strengthen their authority at the urban level. Where the city was a district within a governorate (*kaymakamie*), like Qamishli, all the services—such as the gendarmerie and finance, but with the exception of the post services—were attached to the *kaymakamie*. Hassaka, as the centre of the Sanjak, was the seat of the governor and all the services such as gendarme, post, and finance were attached to him.[555]

City administration was another area where the Christian notables were over-represented. The municipality councils presided by the mayor were outnumbered by the Christian elites, the so-called community leaders. The number of members of the council varied according to the size and significance of the city. The municipality council of Qamishli comprised eight people, whereas that of Amouda and Derbessiye was formed of four members. The Qamishli council in 1939 included 1 Armenian Catholic, 1 Syriac Catholic, 2 Syriac Orthodox, 1 Armenian Orthodox, 2 Kurds and 1 Jew. Compared with the distribution of religious communities in Qamishli, the Catholic Syriacs and Armenians, whose numbers were very modest, were overrepresented. The absolute numbers of the various religious communities, as well as the notables of each community, are given as follows by a French missionary source of the period:

> Syriac Orthodox community: 1,200 families (7,000 persons)
> 11 notables: 1 landowner, 6 traders, 3 farmers (Fr: *agriculteur*; Ar: *muzara'*), 1 school director
>
> Armenian Orthodox: 1,300 families (7,000 persons)
> 7 notables: 1 dentist, 1 pharmacist, 2 car mechanics, 2 doctors, 1 trader
>
> Protestant: 120 families (750 persons)
> 5 notables: 4 traders, 1 goldsmith
>
> Syriac Catholic: 80 families (417 persons)
> 8 notables: 6 traders, 1 landowner, 1 municipality officer

[555] République Syrienne, caza de Hassatché, Municipe de Hassatché, "Rapport de Reconnaissance Foncière de la Djézireh", 1940, p. 2.

Armenian Catholics: 85 families (364 persons)
6 notables: 2 traders, 1 mayor, 1 engineer in the municipality, 1 secretary of the kaimakam, 1 interpreter for the SR

Chaldeans: 95 families (375 persons)
5 notables: 3 traders, 1 pharmacist, 1 chief of Sûreté Générale

Sunnis: 270 families (1,300 persons)
6 notables: 4 landowners, 1 trader, 1 deputy

Jews: 30 families (1,558 persons)
6 notables: 4 traders, 1 municipal officer, 1 cultivator[556]

In Qamishli and in Hassaka, as well as in other Jaziran towns, the authorities recognized the ethno-religious community rather than wards and neighbourhoods as the basic administrative unit. The *mukhtar*s, then, were chosen by the "members" (*ressortisants*) of their respective communities.[557] Indeed, in most of the colonial reports, "the community" and "the quarter" were employed interchangeably.

The colonial policy of settling newcomers in homogenous, secluded neighbourhoods—the case of the Iraqi-Assyrians arriving in the French Jazira in 1931 stands as an example of this *par excellence*—did not, as has been claimed, continue existing patterns of settlement. In reality, several neighbourhoods developed on the basis of the town or village of origin in the homeland and were ethnically mixed. The *Bisheriyye* quarter (groups originally from Bişeri in today's Batman in Turkey) or *Erbawiyye* quarter (those from Erbo in Jabal Tour in Turkey) in Qamishli were such examples. Similarly, Christians and Arabs from Mardin together formed the inhabitants of the *Mardilli* [558] quarter in Hassaka. Ethnically and religiously *non-homogenous* quarters were not exceptions. Mixed neighbourhoods used to be the norm,

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[556] Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, dossier no. 19.
[557] Régie des Travaux du cadastre et d'amélioration Foncière, des états de Syrie et du Liban, Annexe au Rapport de la reconnaissance Foncière de la Djézireh effectuée par le cadastre en 1939-1940, rapport détaillés de a reconnaissance Foncière des villes de Kamechlié, Hassatché, Ras al-Ain, Amouda, Derbessié, République Syrienne, caza de Hassatché, Municipe de Hassatché, "Rapport de Reconnaissance Foncière de la Djézireh", 1940, p. 2.
[558] The word *Mardilli* is a distorted form of the word *Mardinli* which refers to the Jazirans originally from Mardin.

especially among the lower classes. Mixed neighbourhoods and common habitats gradually declined in number, but, thanks to the enduring class inequality, never totally disappeared. Several lower-class Christians and Kurds used to live in the Qaddour Beg and Antariyya neighbourhoods in Qamishli until very recently; and several new rich Arabs and Kurds lived side by side in the "villas," an upper class suburb in Qamishli.

Thus, it may be argued that it is *neither* the so-called "age-old hostilities" between Islam and Christianity, *nor* the "intrinsic qualities" of the ethno-religious groups, *nor* a pure colonial undertaking in which the local actors had no agency, that underlie the idea of segregated neighbourhoods. Instead, the French Jaziran case demonstrates that the ways in which the local agents mastered the colonial resources for their own interests played an important role in the organization of the urban space, but also (as will be seen in the next chapter) in the local politics in the late 1930s.

Accordingly, Qamishli was divided into five principal communities: Syriac Orthodox (Fr: Syrian Kadim), Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Islam and Jewish. The community leaders were respectively, Ibrahim Moussa Esso, Agop Rashdouni, Mansour Atallah, Kamil al-Khatib, and Shalum Dawoud.[559] Hassaka was also divided into five communities, each of which was administered by a *mukhtar* and an elderly counsel. Ibrahim Ishak was the *mukhtar* of the Syriac Orthodox neighbourhood; İbrahim Younan was the *mukhtar* of the Syriac Catholics; Selim Yamen and Aziz Mersho were the *mukhtars* of the Armenian Catholic quarter, Yousef Saboundji was that of the Chaldean quarter, and Yasin al-Aleoui was the *mukhtar* of the *Hayy al Djamé*, the Muslim neighbourhood. Ras al-'Ain was divided into four administrative quarters and was administered by two *mukhtar*s and two elderly councils. The quarters of *Kanais* (Churches) and *Istikhbarat* (Intelligence) were administered by Shukri Agop; the Kurdish quarter (Hayy al-Akrad) and the Chechen quarter were administered by Molla Abdul Ghafur.[560] Amouda was also administered not on the basis of quarters but communities. It was divided into four communities, the Muslim quarter (Hayy al-Islam), the Syriac Orthodox quarter (Hayy al-Suriyan al-Qadim), the Syriac Catholic quarter (Hayy al-Suryan al-Katulik), the Armenian quarter (Hayy al-Arman) and the Protestant quarter. They were administered by Saleh Abdo, Benyamin Melko, Farjo Goro, Vahan Boghossian and Andrés Elia Sabbagh, respectively.[561] Derbessié, too, was divided into four communities, the

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[559] République Syrienne, caza de Kamichlié, municipe de Kamechliyé, "Rapport de Foncière de la Djézireh", 1940.
[560] République Syrienne, caza de Hassatché, municipe de Ras al-Ain, "Rapport de Reconnaissance Foncière de la Djézireh", 1940, p. 2.
[561] Ibid.

Muslim quarter (Hayy al-Islam with the *mukhtar*, Hadji Mohamed Bab Hadj), the Syriac Orthodox quarter (Hayy Syrian Kadim, headed by Moussa Giso), the Armenian quarter (Hayy al-Arman with the *mukhtar* Khorin Farmanian) and the Syrian quarter (Hayy al-Suriyan, headed by Jabbour Kissaa).[562]

Today, there is almost no one left from the Jaziran urban notables of the French mandate period. Most of them fled from Syria between the termination of the French mandate (1946) and the land reforms in the independence period (1956). The pro-French Armenian and Syriac Catholic notables who were politically active in the Jaziran autonomy movement of the late 1930s were among the first emigrants. Unlike the pro-French Arab Sunni notables in other parts of Syria, the Kurdish and Christian elites of the colonial period were rather marginalized in the post-colonial regimes. Those who had been incorporated continue to reaffirm their loyalty to the present regime up to the present day.

The names mentioned under the category of urban notables in one of the first books written on Jazira after Syrian independence (1946) prove this fact. The list by no means consisted of the elites of the French mandate period. The "accepted" urban notables, in their French spelling, were as follows: Abdalmacid Bag Neccar, Hasan Agha Hajo Agha, Sa'id Naum, Reshad Beg al-Haj 'Ali Bey, Ilyas Beg Neccar, Abdulbaqi Nizamettin, Younan bey Hadaya, Melki Gello Shebo, Dr. Ahmet Bey Nafiz, Al-Sheikh Abdulrezzaq al-Naif, al-Sheikh Abdulrezzak Haso, al-Sheikh Ahmad al-Sulumi, Mishil Beg Dom, Manouk Hachaduryan, Sayyid Dawoud Hanna, Jozif Mi'marbaşı, Shukri Chormukli, Zeki Chelebi Haci Genco, Sheikh Hazal al-'Uasi, Zakariya al-Cemili, Abdalrazzak Chalabi Haci Kerzo, İlyas Terzibaşı, Yunis Agha al-Abdi, Cail Agha al-İbrahim (leader of the Milli tribe), Muhammad Ağa Mohamad al-Yousef (leader of the Achitiyya tribe), Ghalib Agha al-Darwish (leader of the Pinar Ali), Thomas Hanna, Abdalkarim Sarkis, Arif Bey Abbas, Dikran N'albentyan, Tawfiq Beg Nizameddin, Hanna Kawmi, Ilyas Sa'igh, Sa'id Sahru, Cebrail Sahru, Sileman Aho, Ibrahim Cinanci, and Davoud Haddad.[563]

The list of Jaziran urban notables obviously needed to be revised after the land reforms of 1956 and the Ba'th revolution in 1961. The Neccar family left Syria following the nationalization of their vast tracts of land in 1956. The Hajo Agha family, the Hevêrkans, left during the same period for similar economic reasons. Although Younan Beg Hadaya sided

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[562] République Syrienne, caza de Kamichlié, municipe de Derbessié, "Rapport de Reconnaissance Foncière de la Djézireh", 1940.
[563] 'Osman Ramzi and Salim Hanna, *al-Jazira wa Ricalatuha*, pp. 15-32. Also see, Iskandar Dawoud, al-Jazira al-Suriyya, (Damascus: n.p 1959)

with the Syrian Arab nationalists during the controversial 1936-39 years and afterwards, the family left for Sweden in the beginning of 1960s. Their beautiful house still stands, bringing to mind the "gold old days" of the "Christian state." Gello Şebo, İlyas S'aigh and Mishil Dom were active in the Jaziran autonomy movement and left the country not long after independence. There are only a few aged members from the renowned Mimarbachi and Terzibachi families and they continue to work as farm owners in rather impoverished circumstances. Manouk Hatchaduryan's famous mill became inactive after 1956, as did its owner, yet his mill is still an important reference point in Qamishli.

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The urban space was also dominated by Christian religious buildings, community schools and missionary buildings. In Qamishli, there were 2 state primary schools and 8 community schools belonging to the Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Chaldean, Armenian Catholic, Armenian Gregorian, Protestant, Jewish and the Dominican missionaries. In 1940, the state schools had 222 students, while the community schools had 1,449 students. In parallel with the Christian domination in education, each community had a church (7 churches in total); there were also one chapel of the Dominican sisters' school (*Soeurs de la Presentation*), one mosque and one synagogue. In Hassaka, there were three state schools, one secondary school and two primary schools for girls and for boys, the total number of students being 221, whereas there were seven community schools (there was no Jewish school) with 930 students in 1940. The churches in Hassaka predominated in the city space, as well. In Ras al-'Ayn, there were 2 state primary schools with 79 students and 3 community schools, with 268 students with 1 Syriac Catholic, 1 Syriac Orthodox and 1 Armenian Gregorian; and 1 French-Syrian school which was taken back by the Franciscan sisters of Hassaka in 1941. In Amouda, too, there were 2 state primary schools with 120 students and 3 private community schools, 1 Syriac Orthodox, 1 Catholic and 1 Armenian with 207 students in total. In Derbessiyye, there was 1 state school with 49 students and 5 community private schools; the Dominican father's school, the Syriac Jacobite School, the Armenian Catholic School (closed down in 1942), the Armenian Gregorian school, and one girls school run by the *Soeurs de la Presentation*, where the total number of students was 278. In terms of religious buildings in Derbesiyye, there was 1 Syriac Catholic church, 1 Syriac Orthodox church, 1 Armenian Catholic church, 1 Dominican chapel, 1 chapel of the *Soeurs* and one mosque.

The director of the eight Catholic schools, in Dayr al-Zor, Hassaka, Qamishli, Amouda, Ras al-Ain and Tell Abiad, was Monsieur Hebbé, the Syriac Catholic priest of Hassaka, one

of the pioneers of the Jaziran autonomy movement. He was assisted by the Dominican priest, Père Savey, another important figure in the "public relations" of the same movement. The heads of all the schools in the whole region were also assisted by Monsieur Hebbé.[564]

These urban centres were not only inhabited by Christians, but also they were guarded by Christian soldiers who were themselves the inhabitants of the cities. As mentioned in the previous section, the dwellings of these soldiers formed an exclusive enclave in the urban space.

French reports claimed that during the mandate rule, the political power and influence of the leaders of the Arab and Kurdish tribes, i.e. the Muslims, was gradually being transferred to the "urban *allochthons* of the cities."[565] It would however be a mistake to accept this argument immediately and at face value. First of all, the Christian urban notables usually did not *own* land. It was usually the Kurdish and Arab tribal leaders who actually owned the land and built residences both in the cities and the countryside. Mishal Pasha of the Shammar had a residence in Hassaka, Muslat Pasha of the Ghubur and Hajo agha of the Hevêrkan all had residences in Hassaka. Mahmud Bey of the Milli and Mohammad Abdurrrahman of the Tayy had residences in Qamishli.[566] The Christian urban notables were usually farm owners (Ar: *muzara'iyyin*), real estate brokers or commission agents. They were involved in money-lending or land speculation, which helped them to create a network of alliances or personal clients in the countryside. They played an intermediary role between the countryside and the urban centre. In this way, they were able to impose their political dominance on the countryside, which would have long-lasting effects into the later years of the mandate.[567] The obligation of commercial transactions such as credit relations made the newly settled peasants, both smallholders and sharecroppers, dependent on the money-lenders or the urban tradesmen. The commercial bourgeoisie of the cities became the intermediaries between these peasants and the outside world in Jazira and in other Syrian towns, especially Aleppo. Trade, which was traditionally made between the newcomers' former home towns and north-eastern Syria and Iraq, came to be replaced by the Jaziran trade and, starting from the early 1930s, by the Aleppo-Qamishli trade. Still, the rural character of Jazira determined the physiognomy of the urban centres, which to a larger extent can be compared to regional markets and export channels for agricultural products.

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[564] Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, dossier no. 22, "Règlement des Ecoles Syriennes Catholiques en Djézireh".
[565] République Syrienne, "Rapport générale de la reconnaissance Foncière de la Djézireh", 1940, p. 14.
[566] Velud, *Une Expérience*, 493.
[567] Velud, "L'émergence et l'organisation", p. 98.

The old tribal leaders became the new landowners. The traders carried out the transactions and the loans of the land in the countryside; money-lenders held part of the credit; artisans produced and repaired the agricultural equipment and tools necessary for peasant life; car mechanics provided the transport—in other words, the urban population lived off the countryside.

Communal networks played a very important role in the development of the Aleppo–Qamishli trade. Through mobilizing their communal resources, the Armenians turned out to be the pioneers in the flourishing of this trade between Aleppo and the Jaziran centres. Kurds were also involved in this trade, usually as peasants producing the foodstuffs or raw material or as intermediaries gathering and sending off the material from Qamishli to Aleppo. The Christians, especially the Armenians in the case of Aleppo, usually distributed them in Aleppo, just as the Jaziran Armenians distributed the Aleppine manufactures in Jazira. Consequently, the *Khan al-Jazira* in Aleppo became one of the most active commercial depots in the city.[568]

It is evident that by the early 1930s the tribal structures had started to break up, and were being infiltrated by "foreign elements," as the French officers put it. According to a French report dated 1940, the urban centres had started to gain the upper hand over the countryside in political and economic matters, and "Jazira tended to become the country of Muslim Arabo-Kurdish sedentarisation, dominated by the landowner and financial oligarchy of Christian notables and traders."[569] Similarly, Velud argues that there is nothing unusual about the hyphenated labelling of the "Christian-minority," as Christians had historically been in the same situation during the Ottoman Empire.[570] What is novel under the French rule, Velud adds, is that "these Christian minorities proclaim the French protection which is de facto granted and exercised in the name of religious solidarity or political alliance with a certain group in the steppe world or in the urban centres."[571]

However, Velud's implication that Christians were fixed subjects who were displaced simply as "minorities" from an imperial rule to a colonial rule is highly misleading. They had never been "minorities" in the same way that they would become "minorities" in the colonial setting of the mid 1930s. It is certainly the case that the old rules of governance in the Ottoman Empire/Turkey were replaced by a relatively institutionalized elite-dominated pro-

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[568] Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, p. 527.
[569] République Syrienne, "Rapport Générale de Reconnaissance Foncière de la Djézireh", 1940, p. 14 (annexe au rapport de la reconnaissance Foncière de la Djézireh effectuée par la cadastre en 1939-1940).
[570] Velud, *Une Expérience*, p. 497.
[571] Velud, *Une Expérience*, p. 497.

Christian sectarian rule. Insisting on there being continuity between the Christians' "minority" status back in Turkey and in French-Syria obscures the resulting transformation in the understanding of self and community under the colonial rule and in the underlying social, economic and political power relations. Furthermore, such a perspective ignores the political context of the debates around the notion of "minority," and thus overlooks the Jazirans' agency in negotiating the terms of "being a minority" under the French rule.

The Refugee Question in the Eyes of the Arab Nationalists in the 1920s

As mentioned above, there is almost no critical scholarly work in Arabic concerning the relations between the newcomer refugees (*muhajirun*) in Syria and the local population in the early days of French colonial rule in Syria. World War I and the early days of the French mandate period remain under-researched areas at best, and the scholarly and popular works by Syrian writers on the same period are mostly political histories written from above.[572] Nora Arissian is the first researcher/academic who has attempted to write the history of the 1915 Armenian genocide through the eyes of the Syrian Arab nationalists of the day.[573] Together with her study of the memoirs of Syrian intellectuals on the genocide—both of them banned in Syria—her work stand as the first in a field that is waiting for more historical research.[574]

Surviving the massacres and arriving in the Syrian land under conditions of extreme impoverishment, the refugees' survival and later gradual integration into the host society was not as smooth as the official history and the present-day memories argue. Neither the Arab

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[572] For a survey of the existing Arabic literature on the Armenian genocide, see Nikolay Hovhannisyan, *Arab Historiography on the Armenian Genocid*e (Yerevan: National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia Institute of Oriental Studies, 2005). Rifaat Mohammad has also made an excellent survey of the Egyptian sources on the Armenian genocide: Rifaat Mohammad, "Al-qadiyya al-armaniyya fi al-masadir al-'arabiyya" [The Armenian question according to Arab sources], paper presented at the conference, The Armenian Genocide and International Law, organized by Haigazian University, Beirut, Lebanon, September 2009.

[573] Nora Arissian, *Asda' al-ibada al-armaniyya*. Arissian covers thirty newspapers from the Syrian-Arab press published between 1877 and 1930, ranging from the widely read Arab nationalist press such as *al-muqtabas*, *alifba* and *al-qabas* from Damascus, to *Hims* from Homs and *al-taqaddum* from Aleppo. As the title of her book suggests—The Echoes of the Armenian Genocide in the Syrian Press (1877-1930)—she narrates the history and transformation of the Armenian issue in the eyes of the Syrians from the end of the 19th century through the French mandate period. The articles she covers also provide rich details about the everyday experiences and survival strategies of the Armenian newcomers in Syria.

[574] Nora Arissian, *Ghawa'il al-arman fi al-fikr al-suri* (Beirut, Dar al-furat, 2002). She analyses the memoires of the following Syrian Arab nationalists: Fa'iz al-Ghussain, *Martyred Armenia* (translated from Arabic; London, 1917); Amir Amin Arslan, *Muzakkarat* (Buenos Aires, 1934), the memoirs of an Ottoman-Arab notable, the leader of the Turkish-Syrian Committee in 1890; Fakhri al-Baroudi (1887-1966), *Sittin 'amman tatakallam, Muzakkarat al-Barudi* (Beirut, 1952); Mohammad Kurd Ali (1876-1953), *Muzakkarat* (Damascus, 1951) and *Khutut al-Sham* (Beirut, 1969), 3 vols.; Yousef al-Hakim (1879-1979), *Suriyya wa ahd al-Othmani* (Beirut, 1980); Faris al-Khoury (1877-1962), *Awraq Faris al-Khoury* (Damascus, Tlas, 1996), 2 vols.

nationalist press of 1920s nor the local population was as welcoming and tolerant towards the newcomers as the later written histories and the memories claim them to be. Still, one should refrain from assuming that the Christian refugee–local population relationship was homogenous, or that the Syrian Arab nationalist elites were univocal. The relationship took different forms according to region, class, and several other local factors. Compared with the anti colonial Arab nationalist Damascene media, the Aleppan daily, *al-taqaddum*, was the most distinguished alternative voice.[575] In the following pages, most of my examples will come from the former, the Damascus-based newspapers *al- Cha'b* and *Alifba*.

The refugee question in the 1920s formed one of the key issues through which the notions of national unity, national territory and national sovereignty were negotiated and constructed, at a time when Syrian unity was officially contested by the French and its local supporters. Below I will briefly portray how the refugees and the refugee issue were understood and dealt with by the mainstream Arab nationalist press in the early mandate period. My focus will mainly be on the response of the Arab nationalists to the settlement of refugee populations in the French Jazira. I will mention the specificities of each group, Kurds, Syriacs and Armenians, when necessary.

In the Arab nationalist press of the 1920s the arrival of the refugees was foremost a political issue, just as much as it was a Syrian social and economic problem. The arrival and settlement of the refugees either in inner Syrian towns or in the remote corners of French-Syria was directly linked to the French divide-and-rule politics. The flow of refugees into the Syrian (national) space, which persisted through the 1920s without any expression of consent by the local Syrians, evoked a lack of agency due to the "sovereignty deficit" in the Syrian national-self. The post-colonial state's primary task would be then to "fill in" this "absence."

Secondly, the refugee issue was not necessarily experienced as, or translated into, sectarian Muslim-Christian hostility. The French colonial accounts viewed the conflict through their sectarian lenses and argued that it was due to "some chauvinistic personalities, in particular the Muslims who were apprehended by the arrival of an avalanche of Christians since their presence would have an effect on the election results." Despite the fact that it *also* gained a sectarian dimension in later years, the French reports usually underestimated the social and economic dimension of the issue as well as the everyday tensions between the local Syrian Christians and the newcomer Christian refugees. The memories of the newcomer

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[575] Iskandar Keshishyan, *Safhat wasaikkiyya min carida (al-taqaddum) al-halabiyya, al-ahwal al-armaniyya wa al-'arabiyya fi al-dawla al-'osmaniyya wa al-bilad al-shamiyya* (Damascus: Dar Tlas, n.d).

Christians about their early days in Aleppo refer to the uneasiness in everyday interaction between the local Christians and the newcomer refugee Christians.[576]

The refugee issue became pronounced every now and then during different political occasions such as general elections, the announcement of the new citizenship law (1925), the year of the economic crisis (1929), and throughout the whole period between 1925 and 1933 during when the refugee flow to Jazira was at its peak.

Aleppo, having the biggest immigrant population, was the city where the social and economic discomfort was translated into communal fights thanks to the French politics of difference.[577] 35 percent of Aleppo's population was composed of Christians, and the French officers embarked on manipulative efforts to "counter" Arab nationalist political activity through playing the "Christian card." There were two basic instances where the refugee issue occupied the priority in the nationalist political agenda. One instance was the late 1920s, when the adverse effects of the world economic depression started to be felt in French-Syria as the Syrian pound was tightly tied to the fluctuations in French franc.[578] The second corresponded to the settlement of Kurds, Armenians, Syriacs and other Christians from Turkey in Jazira between 1925 and 1930. Despite a relative decrease after 1930, the arrival of 17 thousand Iraqi-Assyrians in the French Jazira in 1933 provoked great anger among the Arab nationalists.[579]

In the early 1920s, the main characteristic of the discomfort of Syrian society was the colonization of Syrian space by the refugee population. The immigrants (*muhajirun*) were targeted as being the cause of the economic adversities and social deprivation experienced by the *local* Aleppans. The nationalist press drew a fundamental contrast between the *newcomers* and the *locals*, usually without referring to the religion or ethnic affiliations of the newcomers. In certain instances, the refugees were labelled "parasites" (*muhajina*, *tufayli*) who arrived in the country and seized the locals' jobs; yet the local population was not defined in exclusive religious or ethnic terms such as "Muslims" or "Arabs." An article in *alifba* in 1923 reads:

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[576] Kamil al-Ghazzi, *Kitab Nahr al-Dhahab fi Tarikh Halab*, 3.vols, ed. Shawqi Sha'th and Mahmoud Fakhouri (Aleppo: Arab Pen Press, 1991). One of the few sources that mention the local Christian–newcomer Christian tensions is the history of Aleppo by Abou Dick, the Syriac-Catholic priest of Aleppo: Archimandrite Ignatius Dick, *al-hudur al-masihi fi Halab* (Aleppo: Rum-Catholic Publishing House, 2003), 3 vols.
[577] Pierre La Mazière, *Partant pour la Syrie* (Paris: Libraire Baudiniere, 1926), pp. 200-203.
[578] Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, pp. 85-91.
[579] Longrigg, *Syria*, p. 213. *Al-ayyam*, 10 September 1934.

> There is no force that prevents their flood-like assault on us. They are the main cause of the inflation and lack of estates for rent in the city. The misfortune is there in front of our eyes, but we can do nothing to get rid of this curse [*bala'*].[580]

The same article continued with a softer tone by resorting to the "Syrian generosity,"

> If we were well to do, we would help them, but that's enough! We are not against the distribution of land to those poor refugees, but everything has a limit, the facilities provided for refugees have exceeded those limits. The number of immigrants and strangers [*muhajirun wa ghuraba*] is more than the number of locals [*wataniyyun*] in the government offices or the number of refugee workers in the city is more than the local workers.

The excessive number of jobless refugees, who are stealing the jobs of the Syrians (*wataniyyun)* (*yizahumun 'amal wataniyyun ala rizqihum wa khayrat al-balad*)where there is already unemployment,[581] was a commonly recurring phrase in the newspaper columns of the early 1920s. Another "misfortune" introduced by the refugees, according to the nationalist press, was their sets of values (*nizam 'orfi*) which were viewed as "harmful" for the country. The Damascene Arab nationalist newspaper *al-Cha'b* informed its readers that

> the communal-land ownership system [*nizam masha'a*] in the Armenian settlements [*musta'marat*] reminds one of the communist system which the whole world, [including the French] are against … the head of the village allots the land to the villagers in the settlement; he distributes the equipment, collects the harvest and distributes it equally between the villagers and also it is him who takes the collective decisions concerning the daily needs of the settlement population.[582]

The author first compared this system to the collective landownership of the feudal times, then drew parallels between the Armenians' social structure and a militaristic order, and lastly argued that this social order was informed by "communist principles." The article ended with the author's call for attention to the alarming possibility of the "contamination of Syria by the red danger." By bringing in the "red danger" into the refugee issue, the writer appealed to the anti-communist sensitivities of the mandate power and also highlighted the "common interests" and the "common enemies" shared by the Syrian-Arab nationalist elites as the ruled, and the French as the ruler. This stance resonates with Khoury's argument that the dominant version of Arab nationalism in French-Syria had lost its social revolutionary character in the hands of the landowner urban notable class, from which the first generation of Arab nationalists in Syria originated.[583]

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[580]Alifba, 26 October 1923.
[581] al-Cha'b, "hawadis wa akhbar mahalliyya, halat al-arman al-laciyn li suriyya, al nizam al-shiu'ai wa mazar'au al-arman", 21 December 1928.
[582] Ibid.
[583] Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, p. 343.

The offer of Syrian citizenship to the Armenian refugees by the mandate authorities in September 1924, thus institutionalizing the Armenian sect as one of the nine sects in French-Syria, was one of the first instances where the religion of the refugees was referred in an explicit way; thus the "*ahl al-balad*" came to be labelled with an exclusively religious affiliation. Watenpaugh calls the negotiations between the colonial power and the Armenian refugees a "survivor's bargain." He argues that the "ambiguous and vulnerable status of the Armenians in Syria forced the communities to mobilize political and cultural resources and to accept governmental and non governmental paternal and, albeit- often altruistic- help, a process which he denotes a "survivor's bargain" after Deniz Kandiyoti's concept of "patriarchal bargain."[584] In return for their cooperation with the social, economic, ideological processes of imperialism, they would receive material and discursive support for its corporate preservation as a distinct entity and its transformation into a distinct class.[585] Despite the fact that writing the conflictual local-refugee relationship into a sectarian ledger was still not hegemonic idea in 1920s, the French colonial strategy of reinforcing and expanding the political spaces reserved for the Armenians in the new confessional system in Syria, in order to advance their interests, accentuated this alignment. The immediate aftermath of the 1926 elections—when the High Commissioner decided to redistribute some of the existing seats in the Syrian national representative council in order to counter the nationalist vote—became such an instance where anti-Armenian sentiments were manifested in terms of Muslim-Christian rivalry in Aleppo.[586] As a result of the French manipulation of the population figures, the Armenians were accorded two representatives in the 1926 elections, despite the fact that their population was not sufficient even for one. In the election, which was boycotted and declared as illegitimate by al-Kutla al-Wataniyya, "only within forty-eight hours, the Christians came to have six whereas the Muslim majority got only five seats" stated the newspaper *al-Cha'b* with bewilderment and anger.[587] The article continued as follows: "By decreasing the number of Muslims from 30 thousand to 25 thousand and by not recording the number of emigrating Armenians out of Syria, the locals' [*ahl al-balad*] right to vote and elect was conferred to the strangers [*ghuraba*]."[588]

The unity of Syria formed the primary political agenda of the Arab nationalist movement in the 1920s. The nationalists continuously protested against the *infisal*, namely the division

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[584] Keith Watenpaugh, " Towards a New Category of Colonial Theory", p. 600.
[585] Ibid., p. 603.
[586] Longrigg, *Syria*, pp. 171, 172.
[587] *al-Cha'b*, "hukuk al-aksariyya wa akalliyat", 3 April 1928.
[588] Ibid.

of Syria into four autonomous units (*iba al-aqdiyya al-arba'*). The divided Syria was labelled "the dispossessed homeland" (*al-watan al-salib)*, while the "territorial unity of Syria" (*al-wahda al-suriyya*) was put forward as the goal (*dhala*) aspired towards by the Syrians. Nevertheless, the Arab nationalist political parties, from the most radical Shahbandari line to the pro-French liberal constitutionalists, having invested their confrontational potential on the question of Syrian unity which was fiercely contested by the French and its the local Syrian beneficiaries, rarely questioned the legitimacy of the French rule in a radical manner in their approach to the refugee issue. Particularly in the years of economic hardship in the late 1920s, one hardly comes across radical critiques of the French colonial rule or its role in hindering the economic development of Syria. It was usually the refugees who were often slandered, othered and viewed as the origin of the prevailing problem of unemployment and rising prices. The French colonial state was appealed to, and thus legitimized, in the search for a common ground against the refugees, or at times against the Turkish assaults and harmful propaganda that harmed the Syrian entity (*kiyan*). The French mandate authorities were asked for "proper governance" and reminded of their mandate responsibilities granted to them by the League of Nations towards the Syrian entity.[589]

One of the rare instances where the French rule in Syria was directly confronted occurred in the immediate aftermath of the first massive anti-French uprising, the Great Revolt (1925), where a battalion of Armenian-French soldiers fought Syrian anti-French rebels.[590] The resulting angry attack by the Syrians/nationalists (*wataniyyun*) against the Armenian quarter in Damascus following the Great Revolt and the killing of thirty Armenians, was justified by reference to the latter's "proven unfaithfulness" and the claim that "they [the Armenians] have been fighting against those in whose land they are camping."[591] The French were blamed for the Armenian presence in Syria, and thus for the colonization (*istia'mar*) of Syria and the mobilization of the Armenians against Syrians.

Occurring at the same time as the above-mentioned economic deprivation and social and political apprehensions regarding the French rule in the country, the last and biggest wave of refugees from eastern provinces of Turkey in the late 1920s, and of Assyrians from Iraq in 1933 to Syrian Jazira, caused extreme alarm and anxiety among the Arab nationalists of inner Syrian cities. The ways in which the nationalists' uneasiness about the new flux of refugees was articulated was different than the previous alarmed reaction as expressed within the

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[589] *al-Cha'b*, 20 and 21 December 1928.
[590] Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, p. 171.
[591] *al-Cha'b*, "al arman wa qadiyyat askanuhum fi suriyya", 21 December, 1926.

framework of "harmful strangers vs. outraged Syrians." The settlement of these refugees in Jazira was considered as, in the words of the newspaper *al-Cha'b*, "the violation of the sanctity of the Syrian body and national-self," while the refugees were viewed as French "colons."[592] The arrival of refugees in big numbers created fear (and this fear was amply bolstered by the Syrian nationalist press) that more people were on their way to Syria. The newspapers were full of news giving fictitious numbers about new "incursions." It is through this controversial and contested process of French opening up of the Jaziran lands to non-Arab and non-Muslim refugees that Jazira encountered with the Syrian national body for the first time. Jazira was incorporated into Syria against an atmosphere of agony and exhaustion towards the French colonial rule.

It can be argued that Jazira's appearance in the Syrian national space coincided with the French colonial schedule. Jazira's entry into the acknowledged-colonial-space dates back to 1933, too. Previously, it was not even given an entry in the Colonial Economic Bulletins or in the Annual Reports presented to the League of Nations. This colonial mediation would have material consequences that actively informed the nationalist struggle in Syria in the coming years. This introduction and its political repercussions form a background against which the present-day Jaziran memory is (re)formed.

In the eyes of the Syrian Arab nationalists, the settlement of refugees on Syrian land in Jazira and the following land distribution were viewed as fundamentally unjust and illegitimate acts, comparable in essence to the "settlement of Zionist settlers in Palestine." The nationalist newspapers of the day compared the newcomers to the "Zionist settlers," and described the French and League of Nations-sponsored projects of settlement in Jazira as part of a greater project of creating an Armenian homeland (*watan qawmi Armani*) in the middle of the "Arab homeland." Unlike the earlier periods, the French mandate rule and the "humanitarian aid" of the League of Nations were condemned for being pretexts for the "occupation of the country with the Armenians." *Al-cha'b* wrote that "the more money is donated to the Armenians by the League of Nations, the more Armenians will flow to Jazira which will very soon result in turning Jazira into their national homeland."[593] Similarly, the talks between the director of the Central Committee for the settlement of refugees, Monsieur Lytayel (?) and the Armenian community leaders, where the latter asked permission to build permanent houses and to transfer the Armenians from the refugee camps to the newly built residences, were interpreted as "they are not asking for a house, but they ask for a new

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[592] *al- cha'b*, "Suriyya allati la hurmata laha", 13 November 1935.
[593] *al-Cha'b*, "al-watan al-qawmi al-armani fi shimal, yuallim al-suriyyin", 3 November 1928.

homeland" (*al-watan al-qawmi al-armani al-cadid*).[594] This instance seems to have left an imprint in the Armenian collective memory in Aleppo in later years. Talking to my Armenian interviewees in Aleppo, they remember this historical incident as an event which affirms the "official Arab generosity" renouncing the Arab society's "jealous" tendencies.[595]

The anxiety of (dis)union of Syrian land, to which the French colonial religious and administrative politics contributed greatly, made the Arab nationalists view the refugees' arrival and gradual betterment as "penetration into the Syrian land by building houses thanks to the donations from the western governments, especially Britain." If not in the streets, but certainly in their newspapers, the nationalists protested that "they [Syrians] have to pay the price of the refugees' tragedy(*musiba*)" (*mahmuliyn aleyha hamlen*), and at the same time suffer under their "invading armies" (*al-cuyush al-ghaziyya*).[596]

"The settlement of the refugees on the Syrian-Arab land"—an expression that one frequently encounters in the newspapers, is usually followed by an account of the role of "foreign powers" in the "derogation" of Syria, its land and its people—reveals the Syrian nationalist anxiety due to the lack of self/national agency in the making of its own historical destiny. The articles evoke grievances due to the unjust treatment and neglect of the Syrian agency. The title of the above-mentioned article, "*Suriyya allati la hurmata laha*" (The disrespected Syria) epitomizes this national(ist) anxiety due to the "sovereignty deficit" of the Syrians concerning their domestic issues. *Al-Cha'b* stated that "from the time that the Armenians have left their homeland, the doors of *all* the countries have been shut in their faces, *except* this country; it is the security and peace provided by the French that led them to enter here."[597] The same article continued by arguing that the League of Nations approached all the western countries, and eventually the French consented and chose "Upper Jazira" as a suitable spot.

The articles in the nationalist press in the late 1920s to the early 1930s, during the last wave of exodus to Jazira, apparently embrace a more reactionary tone and evoke indignation. However, it is the refugees who were reproached and became the object of indignation in the first place. The articles often ended with the demand to stop *both* the recent Zionist and Armenian migration to the "eastern Arabian land" (*bilad sharq al-'arabi*). An assertive and self-confident rhetoric that claims to represent a united and active Arab nation calling for a

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[594] Ibid.
[595] Mourad, interview with the author, Dar al-Acaza (elderly people's house), Aleppo, May 2007.
[596] *al-Cha'b* , "al watan al-qawmi al-armani fi Suriyya, d'awa al-Orient ila iskan al-arman fi al-Jazira", 28 January 1930.
[597] *al-Cha'b*, "al-watan al-qawmi al-armani fi shimal, yu'allim al-suriyyin", 3 November 1928.

solution for the earlier immigrants as well. "Their stay among us will not last long" wrote *al-Cha'b* in a threatening tone. It continued:

> Jazira is an Arab Syrian land; the Syrians will give it neither to the Armenians nor non-Armenians … They [the Arabs] will resist the settlement with all means possible. We warn the Armenians that a future life in Syria, next to the "angry Arab," will be insecure.

The Arab nationalists did not embrace a colonial racist attitude in their view of the refugees. The Armenian refugees, too, were deemed proper enough to have a nation-state of their own, just as the Syrians were aspiring for one. Several articles in 1930s acknowledged the inevitability of establishing an Armenian national home. They proposed Yerevan for that purpose. The Yerevan option was argued to be "in the benefit of all" including the Armenians, the Syrians, the French and the Turks, such that the Armenians should "spare themselves from this misery, as well as "*bilad arabiyya*"—Iraq, Palestine but most of all Syria—should be rid of danger (*khatar*) and evil (*aswaih*), while at the same time the Turks should no longer be annoyed by their presence in their immediate south."[598]

Against this Arab nationalist fervour and increase in the communal clashes, the main Armenian political parties, Hintchak and Tashnak, began addressing the Arab public and stating their good will. An Armenian journal, *Le Liban*, stated in an Arabic-written article dated 15 May 1930 that the

> Armenians were bound to come to Syria, but they never had the intention to create a national home there, that the Armenians indeed have a national homeland but it is under the Soviet yoke, whenever it is re-opened, they are going to return there.[599]

Similarly, a joint declaration by the Armenian parties, Hintchak and Ramgavar stated that the Armenians have only one homeland, and that is Armenia. In this hospitable country, our unique effort is to provide the needs of our families and assure the education of our children. We would like to see that the cordial relations between the Arabs and the Armenians are maintained and the misunderstandings that give rise to suspicions are stemmed." Several other Armenian journals gave reassurances that Syria was not comparable to Palestine or the Armenians in USSR."[600] The quotation below from an article in the Aleppan-Armenian journal *Yaprad* published on 24 May 1930 signals the emergence of the imagery of the "hardworking and apolitical Armenian guest" in the Syrian collective memory.

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[598] *al-Cha'b*, 28 January 1930.
[599] Taken from CADN, Cabinet Politique, Box 576, Service Politiques, Bureau d'études, "l'Arménie et les Arméniens", rédacteur: cdt. Terrrier.
[600] Ibid.

> The Armenian is hospitalized [sent to hospital] in this country and this fact is recognized by the mandatory power and the noble Arab people. It is very evident that the hospitalised people do not have a claim to pursue anything but politics. The so-called project of "installation of an Armenian homeland in Syria is therefore without any foundation and imaginary.[601]

The other side of the "Dewleta Xiristiyan" label was the "paix Française," as the French SR officers call it, or "security and peace (*aman* and *salam*) as the Jaziran Christians refer to it definitely helped in healing the wounds of the genocide and afterwards. However, institutionalizing religious difference in political and social spheres also helped to further the fragmentation of local society in an ethno-religious ground. The effects of the unequal and segregated colonial modernization lay the ground for the emergence of an elite-dominated sectarianism in French-Jazira, whose features were to a certain extent inherited by the post-independence Arab nationalist regime, too. Thanks to the change in the hegemonic rule from a colonial to a nationalist one following the termination of the mandate regime, the *protégés* and their elites were, then, forced to exalt their community using a nationalist idiom. The current violence and inequalities in Syria that produce the Syrian Christian and Kurdish common sense and the scholarly field, inevitably silence and marginalize certain historical phenomenon and social actors from scholarly scrutiny. An integrated history concerning the controversial encounters between the newcomer refugees and the local Syrian population during French colonial rule in Syria is still waiting to be studied in depth.

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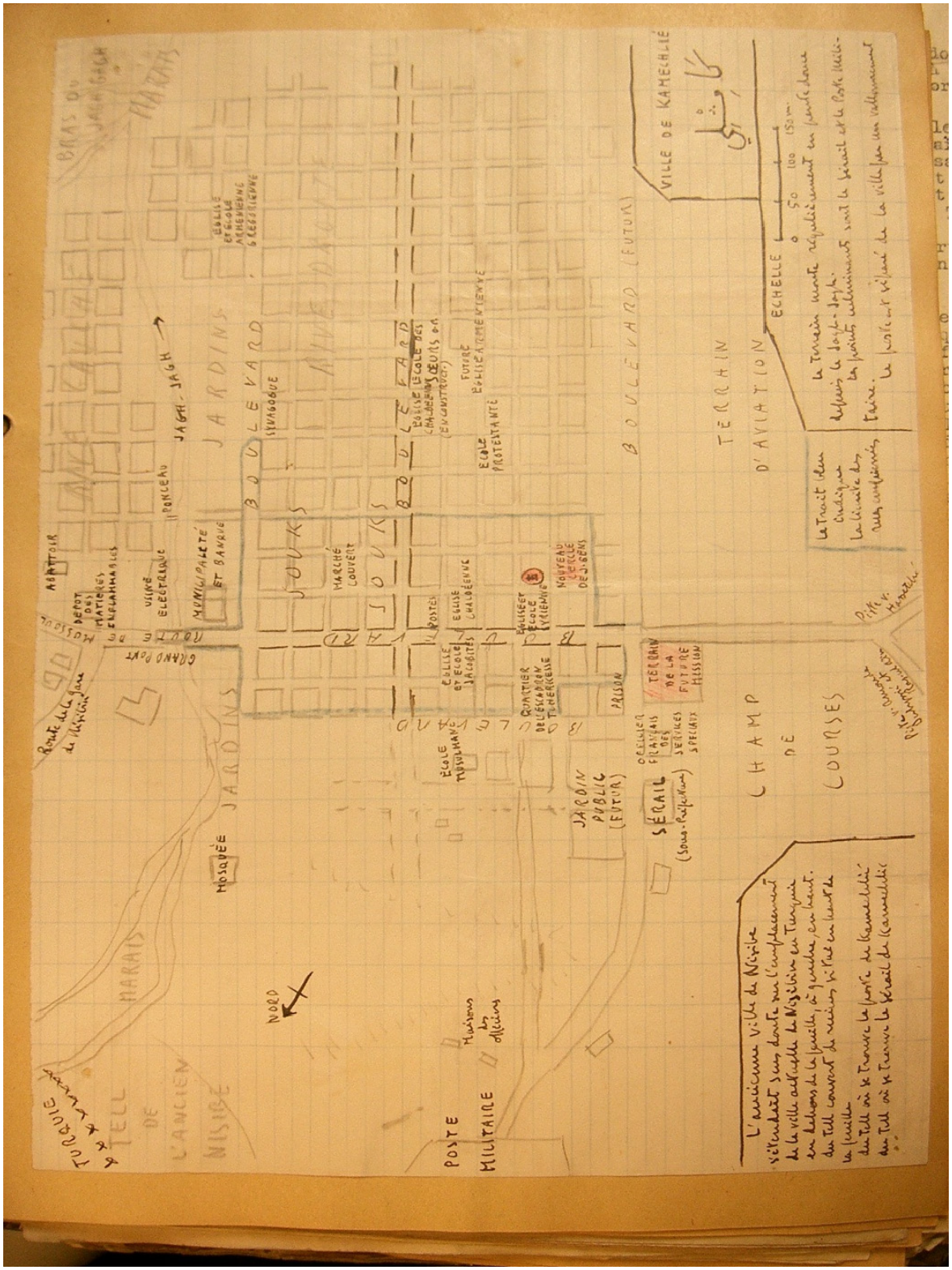
[601] Ibid.



City Plan of Qamishli (Source: Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, file no. K002.4)

Chapter IV Minorities and Majorities in Flux: Re-tracing the Years of the Franco-Syrian Treaty (1936-1939) in the Syrian Jaziran (post) memories

This chapter is about the spectres in the selective amnesia of one of the most dynamic, yet controversial, periods in post-Ottoman Syria, and in particular in Jazira. The spectres haunting memories, or suppressed from conscious memories, date from the years following the Franco-Syrian treaty (1936), which promised independence to the country within the next five years and foresaw the incorporation of the autonomously administered regions into a united Syria. These spectres originate from the fierce controversy over the two fundamental articles of the treaty—the continuing protection of minorities in Syria, and the establishment of a united Syria. The controversy materialized in the form of two opposing political tendencies and movements in French-Syria, epitomized by labels given to them by the French: *les unionistes* vs. *les régionalistes/autonomistes*. Several other epithets were attributed to the rivalling parties by themselves and their rivals such as *la majorité* vs. *les minorités* or *wataniyyun* (nationalists) vs. *infisaliyyun* (separatists). Paradoxically, it was through the (non) violent struggle in the public space over the two controversial articles in the Franco-Syrian treaty that the notions of majority–minority and unity–regionalism crystallized and gained more solid meanings in French-Syria.

The political and social struggle that was carried out through and around these issues was not restricted only to the adherents of the rival political groups—namely the Arab nationalists in National Bloc and their compatriots who were aspiring for full independence in a united Syria; the HC (High Commissariat) and the *Front Populaire* government in Paris which favoured the political demands of the National Bloc government on pragmatic grounds; and the "les minorités," namely the Francophile Syrian elites and their French supporters. All sectors of the Syrian society were going through a transformation in which the notions of religion and community were being redefined.

Unlike the debate on unity versus regionalism, the roots of which go back to the early French administrative division of Syria into smaller Sanjaks on the basis of ethnic and religious difference, the notion of "minority" did not have a pre-given or fixed meaning in Syria. It is in the political context of the early 1930s that the markers of the notions of minority and majority began gaining more concrete meanings in French-Syria, and took on different political implications. The formation of the constituents of minority-ness and majority-ness always referred to larger debates about religion, ethnicity, nation, and territory,

though. They implied the reconstruction of the terms of belonging to the larger community. In this sense, this chapter will discuss the transformation in the imagination of Jazira and the Jazirans both by themselves and the non-Jaziran others, through the contest over the above-mentioned notions following the potential social, economic, and political changes promised by the Franco-Syrian treaty in 1936.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Jazira formed the very space where the French racial categories found their most clearest and most explicit expression—nomad Arab vs. settled Kurd, civilizable Christian vs. warrior and stubborn Kurd—as revealed in several different ethnographic works or reports (there are more studies about this region than perhaps any other part French Syria). Similarly, the colonial power undertook several different schemes for imperial control and governance of the region, given Jazira's large nomadic populations and the newly arriving refugees from Turkey. However, Jazira's introduction to mainstream colonial journals and presentations in the League of Nations reports date back to early 1930s. Jazira's introduction into the Syrian national space intersected with the French colonial schedule. This colonial mediation would have material consequences which would actively inform the Arab nationalist ideology and politics in Syria in the coming years.

The arrival of Assyrian refugees in 1933 and their settlement in Jazira under the supervision of the League of Nations was one of the first of such controversial historical events. As mentioned in the previous chapter, French financial assistance to these refugees—building homes and granting them full Syrian citizenship in 1934—was viewed by the Arab Nationalists as yet another French attempt to create its "loyal colons." The debates around the controversial Personal Status Law (Fr: *la statut personnel*, Ar: *qanun al-ahwal al-shakhsiyya*, popularly known as *qanun al-tawa'if*) in 1934 also had repercussions in Jazira, where outspoken Catholic religious figures—namely the Syriac Catholic priest of Hassake, Mgr. Hebbé, and the Syriac Catholic Cardinal Cardinal Tappouni—intervened in its favour; though the issue was relatively marginal at societal level.[602]

The critical moment at which Jazira erupted into the Syrian national space was the commencement of talks between the French and the Arab nationalists for the independence of Syria in 1935, and, more fundamentally, the emergence of the Jaziran autonomy movement

[602] Personal Status Law in French-Syria is an understudied topic. Major studies on Syria rarely mention the issue, in case they do, they mention it only in relation to the Arab nationalist politics. Albert Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946); Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate,* pp. 576- 77.

(1936–1939) as a response.[603] The autonomist group protested against the Arab nationalist idea of a united, centralized, and independent Syria, and called for a decentralized Syria and the continuation of the French mandate rule as the "protector of the Jaziran minorities." From then on, Jazira along with three other regions inhabited by compact minorities (the Sanjak of Alexandretta, the Alawite region and the Druze region), became one of the primary reference points in the political discussions on the *la question des minorités* and the *organization des mohafazats* (autonomous provinces) Jazira as a territory, and *Djéziriotes* as its inhabitants, were imagined through this dialectical process.

Starting from mid 1930s, the Jazira region conjured up a series of meanings for different political projects in rivalry with each other. Different political actors highlighted different aspects of the region and its inhabitants. the French Jazira appeared in the pro-treaty speeches of Pierre Viénot, the state under-secretary of the *Front Populaire* government; in the journals of the anti-treaty groups in favour of continued French presence in Syria such as the *committee of the journal of l'Asie Française*; in the despatches of the colonial newspaper *Paris Soir*; in the correspondence between the higher echelons of the western religious clergy in the Vatican, Paris and Beirut; in the pages of the Jesuit daily *al-Bashir*; in the French colonial travellers' notes of MM Jérôme and Jean Tharaud; in the reports and petitions drafted by the advocates of the pro-autonomy movements; in the private conversations between the Nationalist Bloc's senior and principal treaty architect, Jamil Mardam Beg, and the French prime minister in Paris and the High Commissioner in Beirut; in the long articles of the Damascus and Aleppo nationalist press, such as *al-qabs*, *alifba*, and *al-cha'b*; and in the long petitions of the nationalist Syrian youth aspiring for a united Syria. Both in the Arab nationalist Syrian imagery and colonial representations, be it pro- or anti-treaty, the region of Jazira and its non-Arab and non-Muslim peoples would soon evoke excessiveness and dissidence—an emergency that needed to be tamed soon.

Elizabeth Picard, writing in 1991, argues that "from the time the project of the independence of Jâzirah Chretienne" in the 1930s was hindered, the relationship between the Syrian Christians and Hafiz al-Assad became ambivalent, in that the Christians was trying to adapt to the opportunities and constraints of its socio-political environment.[604] Despite a

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[603] The crystallization of ideological and political contest over Syrianness dates back to the foundation of the Faysal state prior to the promulgation of the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon (1919–1920). For popular Arab nationalism, see James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[604] Elizabeth Picard, "Critique de la usage du concept *d'ethnicité* dans l'analyse des processus politiques dans le monde Arabe," *Etudes Politiques du monde Arabe* (Dossier du CEDEJ: Cairo, 1991), p. 76.

project of independence never existed in the literal sense of the word, her argument has a great deal of force, considering that the Jaziran experience was formative in the redefinition of the relations between the Christians and the post-colonial Syrian state(s). However, it should also be added that the reverse is also true, that the markers of being the "majority" were also formed in the same period under a colonial rule which was getting anxious about the future of the greater French Empire. The peculiar characteristics of the Jaziran movement for autonomy (especially the fact that it was led by Kurdish and Christian ex-refugees from Turkey as will be demonstrated below) and the colonial and nationalist responses contributed greatly to the substantiation of the most fundamental notions in the Syrian-Arab nationalist ideology, i.e. minority–majority, religion–ethnicity, territory–region, and autochthony–refugee-ness, all of which were inherited in the post-colonial period with unwanted memories.

Furthermore, it would not be misleading to assume that the Syrian Christians did not act as a uniform political bloc at that time (This is true even today, though nowadays there is a high degree of standardization in socioeconomic and political terms); nor was it only the Christians for whom the period was formative. It is in this critical period that several Jaziran "communities" were fundamentally altered with respect to their internal structure, their relationship to the wider society, and their relationship to the colonial state.

Throughout this chapter, as in the others, I try to undertake a dual task: Firstly, I will introduce the debates around notions of minority/majority and unity/decentralization as they took place between different political factions in the 1930s. Secondly, I will show the ways in which this historical period is dis-remembered by the Jazirans in present-day Syria. I will link present-day Jazirans' historical narratives to the contentious political debates and the tripartite power struggle between the pro-treaty France, Syrian Arab nationalists, and the Francophile Syrians supported by the local French officers in 1930s. By this way, I will demonstrate the ways in which the contest over the constituents of "proper Syrianness" in the 1930s have fashioned the terms of belonging and sense of being of Jazirans from different ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds in the post-colonial period. I will contend that the French mandate period in Syria is formative in laying the roots and setting the foundational categories of Jaziran subjectivities in contemporary Syrian Jazira.

The Main Features of Jazirans' (post)memories of the Regionalist Movement

The historical episode between 1936 and 1939 seems to be erased, or at best to occupy a negligibly marginal place, in the (post)memories of Christians, Kurds, and Arabs in the Syrian

Jazira—though this marginalisation definitely operates in different modes. Nor is there any direct reference to the majority/minority debates of the 1930s. To a certain extent, this unfamiliarity and amnesia is reasonable, as almost all of the Francophile elites mentioned in the previous chapter left the Syrian Jazira for Western Europe following the termination of the French mandate (1946), or after the United Arab Republic (UAR, 1958). Ethnic social engineering policies under the Ba'th rule, such as land nationalization and the Arab belt projects, have also transformed the socio-economic and demographic structure of the region. Whenever I asked my interviewees for more details concerning the Autonomy Movement or the so-called Amouda incidents (1937) as will be discussed below—the most violent incidents that the region witnessed throughout the French mandate years, in which tens of Christians were massacred and approximately the same number of Kurds killed in air raids by the French military—they invariably responded with some distaste and affirmed that the incidents were a "typical French ploy in which a handful of local ambitious men took part, who did not have any significant popular support among the local Jaziran population." It was these evasive answers that led me to discern that the Regionalist Movement and its political repercussions in Syria did not evoke wrath *only* at the time of occurrence in mid 1930s, but specifying and referring to this period *still* conjures up images of dissidence in 2000s which the majority of the Jaziran Christian groups try to distance themselves from. This suggests that there is a systematic amnesia, or at least a deliberate silencing of the events. As collective memory cannot be sustained "in pristine isolation from official constructions of the past,"[605] it is worth mentioning briefly how this violent epoch is reconstituted in the Syrian official history.

Post-colonial official histories rarely reserve a place for the Jaziran incidents. The political repercussions of the treaty in the region are touched upon incidentally as a trivial and sui generis divergence from the true succession of events on the inevitable path to national independence.[606] The absence of the Jaziran incidents in the official nationalist accounts follows from a belief of their *triviality* within the latter account; but even more so from the impossibility of finding in the national narrative a place for this moment of violence—which represents a "disturbance," a break in the narrative of nationalist history. There can be no place for "dissident riots" in these histories, except in attenuated forms. Jazira emerges here as

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[605] Ana Maria Alonso, "The Effects of Truth: Re-Presentations of the Past and the Imagining of Community," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, no. 1 (1988), p. 47.

[606] In the official historiography, it is the pro-mandate Scout Movement in Aleppo which turned out to be the stereotype for all anti-National Bloc (*al-kutla al-wataniyya*) activity in Syria. For the Scout movement in Aleppo, see Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern*, pp. 279-299.

a matter of "local detail"—a diversion that is of little moment in the overall scheme of modern, national history and one therefore that is best forgotten.

The mainstream post-colonial official narrative about the Jaziran autonomy movement is as follows: The local French officers and their local partisans (*ansar*) were worried that they were going to lose their vested interests in the region after the signing of the Franco-Syrian agreement.[607] This local faction is usually depicted as a small group of disobedient (*mutamarridiyn*) Kurds and Christians, who were "stirred up by the local French officers as they were already wary of the Arabs and had estranged the Muslims: Anxious that the days of larceny would come to an end soon, the rebel forces conspired and created an atmosphere of intrigue [*caw min al-fitna wa hawadis mufta'ila*] and instigated sectarian factionalism [*fitna tawa'iffiya*]."[608]

Similar to the (post) memories of Jazirans briefly mentioned above, provocation and instigation by a foreign power lies at the core of the official Arab nationalist perspective on the events in Jazira. Thus, the political, economic, and social motivations of the adherents of the Regionalist Movement are underestimated and the movement is exclusively attributed to the conspiracies of the foreign power, i.e. the French. The standard nationalist History account flows by excluding the "uninformed and naïve" local population from the events.[609] The rebel atmosphere soon fades in the official narratives, without 'contaminating the consciousness of the local society' at a time when the Franco-Syrian treaty was annulled and the first signs of the WWII were in the air.[610]

The style and tone of the official accounts are rather abstract and lack any form of human element. No place or person names are ever mentioned; the rising violence is totally disregarded; the rebel group, conceived as an abstract totality, is demonized and the political challenge is "killed" on the spot as the incidents are treated in isolation from the 1930s political conflicts and debates around religion, nationalism and state. In short, the Jazira incidents are removed from the History, and thus the distasteful traces of the mandate period in Jazira have been allegedly wiped out. Indeed, near-eradication of these events in the popular memory would be soon achieved with the flight of the Jaziran notable families for Lebanon or Western Europe following the termination of the French mandate and the later

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[607] It is worth mentioning that the "good French (metropole and HC) vs. bad French (local)" distinction exists in the post-colonial official accounts, too.
[608] 'Ali Rida', *Qissat al-Kifah al-Watani fi Suriyya (1918-1946)* [The Story of the National Struggle in Syria] (Aleppo: al-matba' al-haditha,1979), pp. 441–444.
[609] Najib al-Armanazi, *Muhadarat 'an Suriyya min al-Ihtilal ila al-Jala'* [Lectures on Syria, from Occupation to Independence] (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi bi Misr, 1953), p. 100.
[610] Ibid., p. 103

foundation of the UAR. The final blow came with the violent and racist Ba'th policies, which brought about radical changes in the socioeconomic, demographic, and political structure in the region starting from 1961.

The Arabic language memoirs in Syria, regardless of the writer's place of origin (Jaziran or otherwise) or his ethnic/religious background, are no different as far as silencing the controversy and the contest and negotiation between the centre and the Jazirans are concerned.[611] As will be demonstrated below, Syrian and Lebanese Arab nationalist journalistic accounts from 1936-39, on the contrary, were more alert to the incidents and related them to the heated political debates of the same period. Obviously, a sort of indignation governed the latter's narratives as the normality of change in Syrian society was disrupted with the introduction of foreign colonial French rule. Still, they provided everyday details such as names—in particular the names of the leaders of the movement and descriptive information about the region. Similar to the official accounts from the post-colonial period, the French local intelligence officers in Jazira were blamed for inciting certain people for their own personal benefit. Nevertheless, the journalistic accounts of the 1930s carefully refrained from employing all-encompassing categories regarding the non-Arab or non-Muslim groups in Jazira in order not to alienate ny particular group in the process of imagining the Arab national community.

Arguably, today's middle-class Jaziran Syriacs' (post) memories resonate with the Arab nationalist representations of the autonomy movements in the 1930s. In 1936, it was the Syrian-Arab nationalists who despised the autonomy movement and violently strove to impose their own understandings of nation (which was also in the process of formation throughout these confrontations). In the 2000s, it is usually the Christians of Jazira, in particular the Syriacs, who have adopted the terms of the Arab nationalist discourse of the 1930s, yet refashioned it in a "sectarian" manner, in a way which the post-colonial regimes did not intend. This re-appropriation of the 1930s' official version suggests that the dynamics underlying the social, economic, and demographic changes to Jazira in the post-colonial period also underlie the forming/forging of memories.

The Armenians have placed themselves outside the Syrian domestic equation: "The Armenians in Syria deliberately refrain from intervening in state-related issues and politics per se; [they] only work and lead modest, religious lives"—this is the standard middle-class

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[611] Sa'id Ishaq, *Suwar min al-Nidal al-Watani fi Suriyya* [Images from the National Struggle in Syria] (Damascus: Dar al-Sa'id lil-Nashr, 2003), pp. 25-26; Yousef al-Hakim, *Suriyya wa al-Intidab al-Faransi* [Syria and the French Mandate] (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 1991).

self-portrayal. Asking more detailed questions about the "Separatist Movement" and delving into issues such as sect, nation, ethnicity, and state–society relations usually leads to more evasive and pragmatic answers such as: "We and our religious leaders knew that this country was not going to be like Lebanon *and* we were convinced that we were not going to go back home [to Turkey] but stay in the midst of the Muslims, therefore we were never really interested in politics."

It was distinctively the urban middle-class or ex-elite Syriacs who wholeheartedly displaced the sectarian-dissidence aspect of the Autonomy Movement and insisted on their loyalty to the Arab cause ever since they have arrived in Syria, like, their [religious] leader Aphram Barsoum who, they have argued, has always sided with the *Watanis*. The markers of being a proper-Christian-Syrian will be explored in detail below; but as far as the Syriac establishment discourse confronted with an unexpected question(ing) about a "repressed period" is concerned, it is an anti-politics discourse through which the Syriacs are represented as "religious, hardworking, and peaceful" but historically "politics-averse" community. Another peculiarity intrinsic to the Syriac subjectivity (and no less to the Armenians), as mentioned in the previous chapters, is its temporality: taking the *ferman* as the main threshold in the unfolding of history, and situating the self and the community today with reference to that main node. I demonstrated how the Christian establishment employs the *ferman* violence today in order to obscure the present-day anxieties and socio-economic inequalities, and endorse a "social consensus" understanding of community, as revealed in the following words:

> There was never any kind of violent religious conflict in Syria like in the old *seferberlik* days. Discrimination [*tamyiz*] and religious agitation [*al-taharruk al-dini*] belong to the old times, to the *ferman* times. On the contrary, religious harmony and proportional representation of religious communities have been the hallmarks of Syria.

This standard evasive answer varied slightly depending on the political stance of my interviewees. An elderly intellectual from the Syrian Communist Party (Ar: *al-hizb al-shuyū'ī al-Sūrī*), a Mardin-origin Syriac whose parents had migrated to Damascus from Hassake in 1960s, employed an anti-imperialist terminology to describe the autonomy movement in Jazira, that it was an "imperialist ploy" which had no "real support" among the local population, that "the imperialist French have always stirred up the population and that they

tried to "exploit" the religious feelings of people."[612] He marginalized all forms of ethnic or sectarian conflict (*tawattur*) in the post-Turkey phase of their lives, or at times replaced the "conflict" with its "peaceful version" (*nidhal salmi*), while bringing up several examples of class solidarity from the post-colonial period such as the "joint struggle of the Armenians, Syriacs, and even the Kurds against the Kurdish/Arab landowners [*iqta'iyyin*]." Most of all, he highlighted the "first independence day ceremony in Damascus in 17 April 1946 where the Orthodox and Catholic clergy of Jazira as well as the [Syriac] governor of the governorate of Hassake were present next to the prime minister Shukri al-Quwwatli," in order to prove that "peace" reigned in the relations between the "Christians and Muslims," and "*even* the Kurds."

The Jaziran Regionalists of 1936 had fiercely protested against the centrally appointed officers in Jazira, demanding the appointment of local Jaziran officers to Jaziran administration and blaming the Damascus government for religious discrimination.Contrary to that, the widely shared Syriac (post) memory puts an extreme emphasis on the "absence of any anti-Christian discrimination ever since they arrived in Syria." Significantly enough, the most outstanding evidence of "non-discrimination" in the Jaziran Syriac collective memory is conveyed as being that "the mayors of all the Jaziran cities [almost always referred to by their post-1963 Arabized names, Malikiyya (Kur: Derîke), Qahtaniyya (old Ar: Qubur al-Bid, Kur: Tirbespi), Amouda (Kur: Amûdê), Derbessiyye (Kur: Dirbêsî), Ras al-'Ayn (Kur: Serêkanî), Qamishli (Kur: Kamişlo), Hassake (Kur: Hasake)] were all Syriacs after independence." After presenting several memories from the post-colonial period, the above-mentioned Marxist Syriac intellectual finally touched upon the Arab nationalist political stance embraced by the Syriac establishment (*qiyada Suryaniyya*), in particular the Syriac patriarch Aphram Barsoum whose Arab nationalist political stance was in reality not very clear-cut before the year 1938. Upon my inquiries concerning the 1936 Amouda incidents per se, he described them as "negligible religious skirmishes" in accordance with the post-colonial official Arab nationalist narrative. He refrained from contaminating the Syrian phase of the Syriacs' life through not capitalizing either on the pro-Christian political movements of the mandate period or the anti-Christian attacks during the Amouda incident. Instead, he made a temporal turn in his narrative and reverted to the *ferman* as the underlying cause of the grievances up to the present:

[612] Abu Hanna, interview with the author, May 2006, Damascus, Syria.

> After independence all the mayors of Jazira, i.e. Malikiyya [Derîke], Qahtaniyya (Qubur al-Bid/ Tirbespi), Amouda, Derbesiyya, Ras al-'Ayn, Qamishli, Hasaka, were all Syriac, without any exception. Muslim-Christian relations were pretty good then … We were comrades in the same political party with them and we, the Syriacs, together with Armenians and Kurds fought together against the domination of the Kurdish feudal lords … Yes, there occurred some disturbances here at the time, but they were very small in scale and mostly peaceful. It was the French and their Catholic compatriots who stirred up the region. But, we, the Orthodox were with the Arab cause … . Some problems began appearing when the number of Kurds began increasing and eventually outnumbered the Christians. Then, the latter remembered the violent memories of *seferberlik*, the slaughtering at the hands of Kurds … but actually the problem is civilizational. I mean the problem between the Muslims and the Christians ... we are more open-minded in a lot of respects than the Muslims … and that difference creates a lot of setbacks.[613]

My Marxist Syriac intellectual interviewee refrained from embracing a class perspective, but reverted to a culturalist discourse. He did not even problematize the class differentiation within the Jaziran Christians, nor did he mention the factors underlying the radical change in the socioeconomic structure of the region in the 1960s. He only narrated the story of those who opted for or who were facilitated to be the "majority" in the majority–minority debate of the 1930s. Nor did he mention the dialectical relationship between these notions. That is why his remembrances reveal the very terms of membership of the "dominants' club," the club which has provided "the Syriac community" with relative security and religious freedom. His narrative endorses an anti- or apolitical and ahistorical understanding of the Syriac community (*ta'ifa*), the constituents of which resonate with the state-sponsored definition. As well as this, by configuring the 1936–1939 history as such, he avoids articulating the political controversy that the Jaziran autonomy movement and Jazirans to a large extent were involved in. In a way he marginalizes the whole mandate period or appropriates the historical experience in accordance with the official national truth. As Steedman argues, "absence is not nothing; but is rather the space left by what has gone: how the emptiness indicates how once it was filled and animated."[614] In the coming sections, I will try to unveil how this absence is filled in.

Al-Kawakibi, an aged member of a prominent urban notable family from Aleppo, was one of the very few people who mentioned the Regionalist Movement—yet in the classical official manner, i.e. underestimating the political debate and real motivations of its adherents, as well as externalizing the violence:

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[613] Hanna Ta'awun, interview with the author, June 2005, Damascus, Syria.
[614] Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 11.

> Patriarch Tabbouni was on good terms with the French, he incited everyone [*harraru al-'alam*]. Sadullah Jabiri put these people [Muhsi Ilyas Mersho and priest Hebbé] into prison. Here [in Aleppo], there was an endless struggle against the French; they colonized here, for instance the *naqib al-ashraf* post has always been from our family. The Christians used to the call France "la mère fidèle" [*al-umm al-hanuna*], because the French treated them in a privileged way, all the translators and secretaries were from the Christians.

Another person who was, surprisingly enough, eager to talk about the movement, and presented the names of the movements' leaders fully and correctly, was an elderly activist of pro-Assyrian cause, a current inhabitant of Qamishli. After stating his full-fledged political perspective about the emergence of the separatist movement (*al-haraka al-infisaliyya*)—namely "the greediness of the Nationalist Bloc for the Jaziran petrol and the agreement between the former and the British; political conflict between Jazirans and the Nationalists; political ambitions of the minorities who asked for self-administration"—he continued, commenting on the French mandatory presence, that "the freedom under French rule was an unimaginable one, thus it should not be considered as an "occupation" as they saved them [the Christians] from the Ottoman yoke, aimed to 'turn Syria into a modern country' [*balad 'asri*] and established a political party and a parliament." He added that "underlying the Muslims' anti-French resistance were fundamentally religious feelings, and that the Muslims did not view the Ottomans as an occupier [*muhtal*], but viewed the French as the occupier is an example at this point." This register of truth obviously contests and modifies the Syrian official Ba'th version simply because it is not anti-colonial and it is not an Arab nationalist reading of history. Can it be considered as counter-memory as it challenges the hegemony by offering a divergent narrative representing the views of marginalized groups in society?[615] To what extent does it "encompasses a potentially radical reconfiguration of hegemonic structures?"[616] The conclusion of this thesis will try to answer this question by showing the limits of the rearticulation of history offered by the Jazirans.

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[615] For the discussion of counter-memory, see Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and the American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 213; Graham Dawson, "Trauma, Place and the Politics of Memory: Bloody Sunday, Derry, 1972-2004", *History Workshop Journal*, 59, 2 (2005), p. 151.

[616] For a critical discussion of the notion of resistance and hegemony, see "Introduction," in John Chalcraft and Yaseen Noorani (eds.), *Counterhegemony in the Colony and Postcolony* (Oxford: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 16.

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I was rather confused by the collective amnesia, the incredible gap between the narratives of the Jaziran population and what I had read in the secondary literature, including Western journalistic accounts and history books in French or in English written for the Western audience, which provide the reader with everyday details of the uneasy political atmosphere of the post-treaty years: street violence, closing souqs, increasing ammunition, political propaganda, and commencement of flight among the Christians to Lebanon, and so on.

Concerning the void between today's Jaziran-Christians' (post)memories and the colonial/second-hand publications on the region, an embedded reading of the memories of the Franco-Syrian treaty years helped me to unfold the silence and reveal the particular modes in which these controversial years are forgotten or marginalized. I was able to grasp the political significance of the silences in the remembrances only after I read the first-hand material in the form of intelligence service reports, missionary reports, petitions, pamphlets, diaries, and reports written by the regionalist bloc as they exist in the French diplomatic and missionary archives. A juxtaposition of the Jaziran Kurds' memories with those of the Christians' of the same period provided me with a deeper perspective, too. In other words, through an embedded reading of the Christians' historical narratives on the autonomy movement, I could fix the limits of these narratives, establish their correlations with other statements that may be connected with them, show what other forms of statement they exclude. I could argue that the ways in which this violent epoch is (not) remembered or (not) verbalized provide instances of the workings of memory in the reinforcement and also contesting of a Syrian-nationalist imaginary. To use the expression of Foucault, official Ba'th Arab nationalist discourse underlies "the conditions of existence" of the Christians' memories.[617]

The Kurdish recollections—though fragmented and contradictory—contest and subvert the taboo status of the 1936–39 events. The subversive aspect of the Kurdish counter-memory that triggers a tension appears at two significant moments: firstly, when the past recollections target the master Syrian narrative, similar to the above-mentioned pro-Assyrian activist, *and* secondly in their relatively less essentialist responses to Kurdishness, to the category of their subjection.[618]

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[617] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1972).
[618] My idea of the "liberatory stance in the category of subjection" is inspired from a piece written by James McDougall in the above-mentioned volume edited by John Chalcraft and Yaseen Noorani. McDougall engages with the question of anti-colonial nationalism, state building, and exclusionary identity politics in 20th century Algeria. There he demonstrates the dependence of discourses and representations of liberation on the categories

First of all, the Kurds—unlike the Christian establishment remember and elevate the memories of the post-1936 years and the separatist attempts to a more prominent place. It is neither silence nor gaps that predominate over the past recollections, but a particular narrative which is formed by the merger of fragments borrowed from different and incommensurate narratives, be it the official Syrian, or the local, religious, Kurdish nationalist narratives. This particular narrative is governed by the exigencies imposed on the Jaziran Kurds by the political and social circumstances in and outside Syria following the termination of the French mandate.[619] The fact that the Kurdish recollections might be considered as counter-memory does not imply that they do not share any fragments with the official Syrian version. As shown in the previous chapter, the emphasis on the colonial French–local Christian link is a common remembrance in this respect. However, it is *still* considered subversive by the Syrian establishment, precisely because the implications of a challenge can go beyond the memory of that particular event, targeting the master dominant narrative. In order to point out why the Kurds' memories may be viewed as oppositionary, one must chase the annexed narratives accompanying the narratives of the link between the colonial French officers and the local Christians. The quotation below comes from a middle-aged Kurdish political activist who had his secondary education in one of the Christian private schools in Qamishli thanks to the good relations between the renowned Kurdish poet Cegerxwin, his protector, and the director of the school.

> There were people here trying to found a Christian state and it was the French who beguiled them. The chaos was a response to the intimidations caused by the Arab nationalists.

In the Kurds' (post)memories, what accompanies the classical scheme of "a joint deceit between the colonial French and their local collaborators" is remembering the Autonomy Movement as "a reaction against the central government in Damascus." Accordingly, the Autonomy Movement is reconstructed in "action–reaction" terms where the first "provocative" action is attributed to the Arab nationalist government in Damascus. Despite the fact that none of my Kurdish interviewees had ever read either the mainstream Arab

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of the oppressive order to which they are opposed. James McDougall, "The Fetishism of Identity: Empire, Nation and the Politics of Subjectivity in Algeria," in Chalcraft and Noorani, *Counterhegemony*, pp. 49-71.

[619] The anti-Kurdish policies of the Syrian state basically commenced with the special census in the Hassake province (1962), which revoked the citizenship of some 120,000 Kurds who could not prove that they had been resident in the country since 1945. The following Arab belt policy in 1963 paved the way for the resettlement of Arabs along the Turco-Syrian border in a region with a width of 10-15 km (*ghamr*).

nationalist newspapers of the 1930s nor their pro-French counterparts, their (post)memories hold on to the point of conflict between the two parties, i.e. the central Arab government and the Christians, and proceed from that vantage of contention. Unlike the Christians' (post)memories, the Kurds' memories introduce "the exclusive and authoritarian measures of the central government in Damascus" into their historical narrative and actually embrace an anti-state discourse, as exemplified by the following remembrances of the post-treaty years: the "appointment of Damascene governors to Jazira who are ignorant of local languages and customs and have hostile attitudes towards the locals; the replacement of local officials with the hostile Damascene officials; the ban of Kurdish language by the Damascenes" and so on. Despite the fact that I never came across a "lifting of the ban on the Kurdish language" in the Regionalist Groups' pamphlets in 1936 (the regionalists had overtly insisted on the "appointment of officers speaking the regional languages like Kurdish"), a "ban on language" is mentioned over and over in the Kurds' (post)memories, which suggests that the memories re-appropriate and subjectify this dissident moment in history in line with the present-day Kurdish demands arising out of their disadvantageous situation in today's Syria.

Arguably, Kurds' memories are not a simple replication of the anti-Arab nationalist colonial discourse of the 1930s, a discourse which was at best represented by the Christian faction of the Regionalist Movement in the Jesuit daily *al-Bashir*, or the local French colonial officers in the region. On the contrary, the Kurds position themselves at first at a critical distance vis-à-vis the Syrian master narrative and also to the colonial narrative, as revealed in the quotation below:

> The French were never sincere in their intentions. The French always tried to consolidate their power among the people. Since this land is not the land of Christians, the latter always cooperate[d] with the powerful one. The Christians always go after their interest. That's why they sided by the French. For them, self-interest is above everything else.[620]

The Kurds' view on the Autonomy Movement is less curbed or hesitant compared to the historical narratives of the Syriac establishment, who "care about superintending the remains of the past as if they are always in front of a real or pseudo interrogator."[621] An educated

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[620] Abu Dara, interview with the author, June 2007, Amouda, Syria.
[621] Meltem Ahıska, *Radyonun Sihirli Kapısı, Garbiyatçılık ve Politik Öznellik* (İstanbul: Metis, 2005), p. 67. In her comparison of the BBC archives and the destroyed -Turkish radio archives, she refers to the role of the occidentalist gaze in the organization of the archives and compares the Turkish case to an ever-lasting interrogation. She refers to Heidegger in "What is a thing?" saying that "every historical account … is about an

Kurdish (*Kôçer*) secondary school teacher in his late 60s, one of the first in the tribe who had formal education, stated that "the reason why the *Christians* made this turmoil [*fatashat*] was actually the oppression of the Arab Nationalists." He mentioned the role of the French and their bad intention of "stirring up the population," then immediately passed on to the renowned "autochthony" and "land" issues," which will be discussed in more detail below:

> The Christians collaborated with the French, worked as French officials, soldiers or the intelligence officers, because this land is *not* their land, so they always go after their interests [*maslaha*]. *Interest* is above everything else for the Christians. They were pro-French during the mandate; they became Ba'thi during and after the independence.

This ahistorical and essentialist view, which encapsulates the Christians categorically as "interest-seekers," is an effect of the unequal sectarian system and the anti-Kurdish policies of the post-colonial Syrian states, in particular the Ba'th state. Similar reductionist logic was adopted particularly by the Syriacs as articulated through the "Muslim–Christian dichotomy" in the narratives of the *ferman*, as I have shown in Chapter II. I referred to it as a manifestation of veiled sectarianism in Syria, as such a labelling relied on decontextualized and coherent religious categories. I argued that the Christians' memories of the *ferman* both reflect and endorse a sectarian understanding of community. A similar argument can be made for the Kurds regarding the Christians, namely that the Kurds' memories of the Regionalist Movement in 1936 or the mandate period as a whole give a clue to a similar sectarian/nationalist understanding of the self and the other. In ideological terms, on the one hand, the Kurds attempt to contest Syriac exceptionalism and justify the Kurdish political claim of autochthony in the region; on the other hand they indirectly reinforce the underlying unequal sectarian-nationalist logic in Syria by which the Kurdish problem is largely informed. However, in the hands of the Kurds this narrative never takes the form of a fixed equation where the Christians are represented as the absolute Other of the Kurds. Several local memories of potential (and to a certain extent actual) coexistence potentially controvert the static and coherent state-approved categories; they continue throwing light on the complex meanings of the self and the others.

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unchanging thing. Such a historical account closes the space of history which is itself in the process of formation. It is only when we ask what is still continuing and in the process of formation, then we make a historical questioning.

Syria During the Treaty Negotiations (1934-1936)

1934 and 1935 were strained years in Syria. One important development was the arrival of a large group of Iraqi Assyrians in 1933, who were resettled in Syria after their community had become victims of Iraqi Arab nationalist agitation. The arrival of the Iraqi Assyrians (1933), their settlement in Jazira and immediate granting of citizenship aggravated the tension between the French and the Syrian Arab nationalists at a time when the economic hardships in the country were on the rise. Another major event was event was the introduction of the Tobacco monopoly in March 1935, which was even opposed by the Maronite Patriarch of Lebanon,[622] a boycott of the Damascus Tramway and Electric Company in June 1935, and the Islamist protests against the Shaykh Taj al-din Hasani government on the grounds that he was the "enemy of Allah"[623] were some of the incidents which were immediately translated into anger among the Arab nationalists that there had been little progress towards their ultimate aspiration—full independence. International developments such as the Italian occupation of Ethiopia and the Egyptian nationalists' demand for independence added to the Syrian Arab nationalists' fervour over the restoration of the constitution, independence, and Syrian unity. The closing down of the National Bloc office in al-Qanawat, Damascus, and the arrest of Fakhri al-Barudi, the Nationalist Youth leader, gave way to a general strike in inner Syrian towns that began on 20 January 1935 and lasted for forty-three days. The disturbances, arrests, and even killings occurred in the main Syrian towns. The colonial violence during the strike spread as far as Dayr al-Zor, where French troops killed five students and arrested hundreds. Prominent National Bloc leaders of Aleppo and Damascus were either arrested or exiled. The strike turned out to be a significant event which strengthened the idea among the colonial circles that the Syrian question could be settled through negotiation with the National Bloc.[624]

On March 2, Hashim al-Atasi, president of the National Bloc, declared that a Syrian delegation would proceed to Paris to negotiate a treaty. It was on 13 March 1936, just eight days before the Syrian delegation took the train for Paris for treaty negotiations, that the High Commissioner introduced the "régime des communautés religieuses," or what is known as "Personal Status Law." Treating "the Muslims as one sect among the others," the law was greeted with fierce protests particularly from the Muslim *ulama* and also the Arab nationalists

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[622] Longrigg, p. 268.
[623] Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, p. 454.
[624] Ibid, p. 461.

of all religions. These criticisms would play an important role in the treaty negotiations, too.[625]

The Syrian delegation was composed of four Nationalist Bloc leaders, Jamil Mardam Beg, Hashim al-Atassi, Sadallah al-Jabiri, and Faris al-Khoury. Two European-educated Aleppan-Christian lawyers, and the leader of the Communist party, Khalid Bakdash, accompanied the committee. The coming of the power of *Front Populaire* in France in April 1936—a leftist coalition of Radical Socialists, Socialists, and Communists—did not automatically bring about an easy negotiation process, though.[626] In addition to the built-in limits of the *Front Populaire*, the French right-wing parties and special financial, cultural, and religious interest groups based in Lyon and Marseille, were reluctant to grant independence to Syria. The contention was about the question of Syrian unity and the future of the autonomously administered Sanjaks of Druze, Alexandretta, Alawites, and Jazira. In September 1936, it was almost obvious that the treaty would include these four autonomous regions, but a specific provision for the "protection of religious minorities" would be included "in order to ensure that the Syrian Christians not share the same fate as the Assyrians of Iraq," as repeatedly stated in the French official statements. The Franco-Syrian treaty was signed by Hashim al-Atassi and Pierre Viénot in 9 September 1936. Following the Syrian elections of 30 November 1936, the treaty was ratified in the Syrian assembly on 21 December 1936.[627]

From the perspective of the French adherents of the treaty, the meaning of being pro-French expanded from a narrow definition which only included the "amis traditionnels," namely the Christians, to a more inclusive one subsuming the "moderate-nationalists," whom Vienot calls as "amis de France, mais les adversaries du mandat." As early as August 1934, when the treaty negotiations were still in suspension, the Syriac Catholic Cardinal Tappouni had asked High Commissioner Martel if the HC would accept the transfer of 2,000 Syriac Catholics from Turkey to Jazira. The answers from the Quoi d'Orsay and HC were clear: "Despite [the] Cardinal's devotion to our interests and his incontestable political influence, we cannot welcome these refugees under these political conditions as it would complicate the 'minority problem' on the eve of our agreement with Syria."[628] The new French policy vis-à-

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[625] Benjamin White, "The Nation-State Form and the Emergence of 'Minorities' in French Mandate Syria, 1919–1939", Unpublished PhD dissertation, Oxford University, St. Anthony's College, 2009.
[626] W. B. Cohen, "The Colonial Policy of the Popular Front", *French Historical Studies*, 7, 1972, pp. 368-378.
[627] Bernard Botiveau, *Loi islamique et droit dans les sociétés arabes: Mutations des Systèmes* (Paris: Karthala, 1993), pp. 157-160.
[628] MAE, Syrie-Liban, vol. 466, E 411-2, de Paris 26 August 1934 à Haut-commissaire Français Beyrouth, a.s. Admission des Refugies Chrétiens en Syrie.

vis the "minorities"/Christians is described in the words of the French ambassador in Syria and Lebanon as follows:

> The traditional mission of protection of Christians that France has assumed for centuries has become complex nowadays. By protecting these Christians either in a very assertive way or very narrowly, the French gained an image of exploiting the Christian presence in order to impede the development of national feelings. France has risked the lives of its protégés by turning them into "foreign bodies," condemned to exile or massacre … the French have to look for another formula which permits the minorities to integrate into the national sentiment without sacrificing their own personality and also which permits France to keep the effective means of political action to protect these Christians without jeopardizing them. The minority clause of the Franco-Syrian treaty constitutes this formula. France has to appease both the initiatives of the newly appointed Syrian officers and the "excessive reactions" of some minorities in the sensitive areas especially Jazira.[629]

The French widening in the terms of "friendship" implies a change in the colonial policy in Syria, which paved the way for what the nationalist Bloc called "honourable cooperation" between France and Syria—namely a moderate, negotiatory anti-colonial movement which had lost its revolutionary character a long time ago. The new French politics was referred as "politique de bascule" by the anti-treaty groups in Syria, Lebanon, and in France. [630] The Jaziran autonomists interpreted the replacement of several local French intelligence officers in Jazira who were in favour of the Autonomy Movement by more moderate pro-establishment French officers and the punishment of the leaders of the Movement as an obvious sign of the same "politique de bascule". The Jaziran Regionalist Group was not mistaken in its analysis about the "unfavourable change in the French colonial policy." The former's appeal to the French and demand for the continuation of the French mandatory rule was identified as "excessiveness" by the mainstream French authorities as displayed in the above quotation. A confidential report drafted for CHEAM as early as November 1937, right in the middle of the Jaziran regionalist movement, stated that

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[629] MAE, Syrie-Liban, vol. 519, E 414, 1 ad Syrie, Questions Religieuses, Statut des Minorités, 1930-1935, de l'ambassadeur de France de HC de la France en Syrie et au Liban à Monsieur des Affaires Etrangères, a.s. Les Minorités de Syrie, Beyrouth, 7 July 1937.
[630] Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, Dossier 68, La Question de la Djézireh, Les Fonctionnaires Français: Février-Avril 1938.

> …some of the leaders of the regionalist movement in Jazira lack level-headedness and held on to the tactic of instigating brawls [*chercher la bagarre*] in order to insure that the French does not completely get off the political scene.[631]

The tactics employed by the Regionalists—which ranged from hanging French flags all around the Jaziran towns upon the HC's visit, to violent protests against the officers (both Christian and Muslim) appointed by the central authority in Damascus —were viewed by the central French authorities as "the oriental tactic of creating fuss by some subtle Djéziriote Christians in order to make the mandatory power stay in the region relying on the fact that the French are responsible for the public order."[632]

The next three years following the treaty negotiations (1936–1939) did not proceed smoothly, neither in Syria nor in France. General elections were held in Syria in November 1936 with the Nationalist Bloc winning the majority only in the main Syrian towns. However, the ratification of the Franco-Syrian treaty in the French parliament followed a crooked trajectory. Throughout the three-year probationary period, the right-wing coalition as well as the Lyon and Marseille–based interest groups would fight against the treaty on the basis of French imperial interests.[633] The treaty was eventually rejected in 1939.

The most heated debates in the French parliament took place around the issue of "protection of minorities" and economic and military concessions in Syria. While the HC embraced a pro-treaty stance and openly discouraged the pro-minority movements, including those in the autonomously administered regions in Jazira the Sanjak of Alawites and in the Jabal Druze, the anti-treaty campaign in France grew even stronger after the replacement of the Socialist Blum government by a radical socialist one in June 1937 and the latter's commitment to the French Empire.[634] The political line of the renowned orientalist scholar Louis Massignon, which had been also shared by the HC (which read as "because we are in Syria to maintain our promises to the Christians, we should reposition the defence of minorities in the framework of a frankly pro-Arab political culture")[635] gradually faded. Still, as will be detailed below, until the appointment of the new HC, Gabriel Puaux, the official HC line was very alert about not following a particularistic line and not encouraging the

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[631] CHEAM, "La situation des Chrétiens de Syrie après des affaires de Djézireh," Anonyme, no. 185 bis, p. 3.
[632] CHEAM , "Le Djézireh", Capitaine Pierre Rondot, 14 June 1938, no. 42 ter, p. 1.
[633] The IPC group for oil exploration in Jazira was one of the most influential among the Lyon and Marseille–based group who held economic interests in Syria and Lebanon.
[634] Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, p. 486.
[635] MAE, E-Levant, Syrie-Liban, 1930-40, 5 June 1936, vol. 492, pp. 161-162. Taken from Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, p. 467.

localist demands, while following an integrationist policy by helping the "apparition d'un sentiment national" among the "minorities"—where *national* implies the majority, namely the Sunni-Arab Muslims. This integrationist line, adopted in the mid 1930s by the HC, clashed with the interests of the local French colonial officers in the autonomously administered regions.

The internal division on the French side and the gradual undermining of the treaty negotiations were not without their Syrian facilitators. If Cardinal Tappouni was one of the "de facto members" of the anti-treaty group in the French-Syrian circles, Mardam Beg, the leader of the Nationalist Bloc and the "ami fidèle de France" was secretly agreeing to the French-proposed amendments about ensuring the rights of minorities, and economic and military concessions. The aggravation of the Autonomy Movements and the pro-unity movement in Syria increased the tension and the treaty was eventually not ratified.

Minority-Majority Debates in French-Syria

In Syria, unlike in Republican Turkey, it was *only* in the 1930s in the prospect of a Franco-Syrian treaty and hence Syrian independence that "minority" both as a term and a notion was also attached to existing or prospective personal status communities, either by the French or by Syrians claiming to speak for those communities.[636] The notions of minority and majority did not have pre-made definitions. They did not automatically stand for a certain religious or ethnic groups like Christians, Alawites, Druze, or Kurds. Their meanings were not fixed but were multi-layered and contingent, depending on the political context at certain time and place.

After the mid 1930s, the most straightforward bearers of the term "minority" were those non-Sunni and non-Arab groups who asked for political recognition on the basis of their ethnic/religious/numerical *difference* from the Sunni Arab "majority", a demand which was almost always accompanied with the political implication of the continuation of the French mandate. However, there was an ongoing struggle both *within* these groups, and *between* these groups and the (Sunni) Arab nationalists, "the majority." While the elites of the pro-minority movements strove to render their religious/ethnic communities coherent under the rubric of "les minorités" and asked for rights based on religious/ethnic difference, the Arab

[636] Benjamin White, *The Nation-State Form and the Emergence of 'Minorities' in French Mandate Syria, 1919–1939*, Unpublished PhD dissertation, Oxford University, St. Anthony's College, 2009.

nationalists strived to "unmake" the minority–majority distinction in different ways and subvert the colonial understanding of that distinction from different angles.

Unfortunately, the Syrian Arab nationalists' trajectory was crooked. They had an ambiguous and inherently contradictory stance within their ultimate aim of unity and independence for Syria and Syrians. The same is true for the Arab nationalist ideology which vacillated between civic and ethnic nationalisms, namely defining national belonging on a territorial basis or through one's religion, ethnicity, and locality. On the one hand, the mainstream Arab nationalists promoted a political definition of national belonging as revealed in their slogan "religion to God, nation to all"; on the other hand they did not refrain from defining the majority-ness–minority-ness polarity through essentialised categories such as ethnicity, religion, locality, and population figures.

Initially, the treaty negotiations opened relatively creative ways of thinking about the relation between religion, sect, nation, and state. The Aleppan newspaper *Alifba* was one of the nationalist newspapers that printed more balanced and critical articles sincerely calling for a more inclusive definition of Syrianness. An Aleppan newspaper owned by a Christian, the newspaper tried to subsume, but definitely not assimilate, religious affiliation under an inclusive Syrianness.[637] In an interesting article on 7 April 1936, it approached the notion of minority critically, from a not-yet-explicitly crystallized class perspective. The article stated that:

> Those leaders who propagate the idea of minority rights are a true minority vis-à-vis the majority of the "minority community" whom they claim to represent. As a supreme minority [of landowners], they oppress the majority, namely the peasants in Jabal Druze, Alawites and Jazira.[638]

The statement that the "rights of the majority," namely "the rural majority" (*al-akthariyya al-qurawiyya*) are defrauded in favour of a "minority which does not form one-tenth of the total population"[639] apparently referred to the elites of the Regionalist Movements, but it indirectly addressed the economically oppressive policies of the Nationalist Bloc government too.

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[637] The *alifba* articles that appeared between March and April 1936 are especially significant in discussing what "minority" implies. One of the artciles is titled as "*Marfa'u safinat al-qadiyya al-Suriyya* (the secure harbour that the Syrian boat will arrive in), which implies that the "national homeland is constituted by every single one that this country carried."
[638] *Alifba*, "arq al-sus", 7 April 1936.
[639] Ibid.

However, soon afterwards the notion of minority began to conjure up images of loss of sovereignty and decomposition through decentralization in the eyes of the Arab nationalists striving for independence from colonial rule. Accordingly, the demands for regionalism were easily interpreted as dissident separatist demands by the "minority" in the eyes of those who had begun to consider themselves as the "majority," namely the Sunni Arabs. Soon, the tone of the nationalist papers became more reactionary. The "minority question" started to be viewed as "the best explosive to blow up [*sauter*] a nation," as stated in an anonymous quotation in one of the few nationalist pamphlets.[640]

There are three fundamental reasons why the notion of minority assumed these specific meanings and gradually evoked fear and anger among the Syrian Arab nationalists, regardless of the former's religious or ethnic backgrounds. First of all, the the protection of (Christian) minorities had formed the historical justification for French colonization in the Levant; thus, embracing the minority language and asking for special treatment was easily interpreted as being pro-mandate and anti-nationalist. Secondly, the concurrence between the treaty negotiations around the minority issue and the Personal Status Law, which would turn Sunni Islam into one sect among others, paved the way to the treatment of these two issues on the same axis, which eventually led to the hanging of an onerous "anti-nationalist" label on Christians. And thirdly, the autonomy movements in those autonomously administered regions populated by non-Sunni, non-Arab groups adopted a pro-mandate attitude and asked for the continuation of their autonomy—what the Arab nationalists referred as separatism (*infisal*).

A nationalist pamphlet titled "Syrie 1938" stated that "there is no term vaguer than that of minority."[641] However, what is implied by "vagueness" here is hardly comparable to the multiplicity of opinions about the notion of minority as was generally the case in mid 1930s. By 1937, the Arab nationalists' efforts to unmake the colonial understanding of the majority–minority opposition through a civic understanding of nation would already be rivalled by an ethnic/religious understanding of Syrianness in a new political context where the French turned out to be reluctant to ratify the treaty and the regionalist movements were increasingly contesting, and eventually deferring, Syrian union.

The writer of the same pamphlet would still propose a political definition of national belonging by bringing in the nationalist declarations of Christian deputies or presenting examples from the "Arab-Christians" who are "more attached to the national idea" as proved

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[640] Syrie 1938, Office National Arabe, p. 21.
[641] Ibid.

by the "loyalty of the Kurds and the Armenians during the Sanjak of Alexandretta incidents."[642] The nationalist writer then would turn to the Druze and Alawites, to whom the Regionalists referred as "les minorités," claiming that "they are indeed Arabs and Muslims, and should not be treated as a non-indigenous [*allogene*] groups."[643]

As the above example demonstrates, the political definition of national belonging implied supporting the Arab cause and incorporating religious and ethnic difference under an inclusive Arabness. The role that the Sunni Arab nationalists (hereby the majority) expected from the non-Muslim and non-Arab groups, if they wanted to remain in Syria as Syrians, was to obscure and de-politicize their differences by privatizing them. The nationalist slogan "religion is for God and the nation is for all" evokes such an idea. And as the (post)memories of the Jaziran Christians prove, they have done so to a certain extent. The most explicit sign of the pragmatic consent of the Christians to the political definition of belonging came after the two violent sectarian incidents in mid 1937: the Sunday market incident in Aleppo[644], and the Amouda incidents.

Several such incidents occurred where different kinds of discomfort and apprehension were manifested in sectarian terms, especially in Aleppo and in Jazira. Every time, the nationalist-Christian religious leaders would intervene; they would calm down the '(Christian) community' and reassure the '(Muslim) majority'. The Armenian Orthodox patriarch Ardavazd Surmeyan may be considered as one of the first-comers to the rapprochement scene following the Sunday market incidents in Aleppo on 12 October 1936. In his visit to the Armenian refugee camp in the north of Aleppo, he said:

> I came here with the nationalist leaders in order to invite you to be calm and to return to your work. We have every interest in having cordial relations with the Muslims. The incidents of last Sunday Market had their origin in the "White Badge" group who are bought and paid for certain traitors; they create discord between the elements of the country in order to obtain their goal. I ask therefore all Armenians to have no relations with the "White Badge" and to prevent even that these people circulate around [the tent-city].[645]

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[642] Ibid.
[643] The autochthon–refugee distinction in the debates on the notion of minority always refers to French Jazira. This will be explored below.
[644] The immediate cause of the violence that left five killed and hundreds wounded remains unclear, but it was caused by the confrontation between the two oppositonary groups, namely the *Steel Shirts* and the *White Badges,* the National Bloc Scouts, and the pro-Christian and pro-French group, respectively. For a more detailed account, see, Watenpaugh, *Being Modern*, pp. 271- 278.
[645] CADN-MAE, Fonds Beyrouth, Cabinet Politique, 392, Sûreté Générale (Aleppo), no. 3829, 16 October 1936; taken from Watenpaugh, *Being Modern*, p. 271.

He was followed by the Armenian Catholic patriarch in Antilias, Beirut, calling for tranquillity and reminding the community that "they will continue living on this land with the Syrians."[646] While the Armenian political parties (Dashnak, Ramgavar, and Hinchak) were still aiming to maintain amicable relationships both with the French and the Arab nationalists, and were politically divided in their support either for the pro-French or the Nationalist Bloc, they began taking a more pragmatic approach in the mid 1930s and tended towards supporting the Nationalist Bloc in Syria, particularly after 1936.[647] The Armenian communists in the Syrian Communist Party had always sided with the Arab nationalists struggling for full independence. However, this did not mean that the Armenian parties were transformed into a Syrian political force, but rather that they opted for cooperating with the "moderate opposition to the mandate." Through this political choice, the Syrian public space reserved for the Armenians became an arena for intra-Armenian competition between three political parties. The Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Aphram Barsoum had also made several calls to his sect to refrain from extremism during his trip to Jazira after the violent Amouda incidents. This tacit agreement between the Nationalists and the (Orthodox) Christians—an agreement based on a political definition of national belonging—still survives, though in completely different modes especially after the intensification of Arabisation policies during the Ba'th rule. Present day Jaziran-Christians rely on and endorse this political definition of belonging. This very ideology forms the ground on which they can appropriate the official harmony and coexistence discourses.

Demographic statistics formed an indispensable part of the majority–minority claims. Population figures always mattered in the construction of majorities; the same is true for the construction of minorities. Figures were employed by the Arab nationalists to manifest two things: firstly, to prove that the question of minorities was indeed a negligible problem, not a very acute one such as in Iraq; secondly, to demonstrate the numerical superiority of the Sunnites (including the Kurds) over the rest of the groups on which they would build their political superiority and hence legitimate claim to rule.

The Arab nationalists adopting the political definition of national belonging highlighted the anti-discrimination laws as stated in Articles 26 and 28 of the new constitution (public employment without distinction of religion and ethnicity, guarantee for religious rights of religious communities, and right to education in the language of the community). Through

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[646] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Syrie-Liban, Box 494, Presse d'Alep, al-Ittihad, "Un Appel de l'évêché Arménien Catholique", 5 Juin 1936.
[647] Miglioriono, *(Re)constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria*, pp. 58-62.

overstating these laws in public discussions, they appealed to the non-Arab/Sunni groups grouped together as "les minorités" by the Regionalist Movements, and aimed to incorporate them into the "Syrian nation." As well as this, they addressed the Sunni Arab "majority" by pointing out that the presence of non-Arab/Sunni should not be viewed as an obstacle to national independence and unity and that they could be tamed within the framework of a modern nation-state.

As far as the pro-minority autonomist groups are concerned, they strove to unmake the cogency of the above-mentioned legal guarantees within an orientalist understanding of Muslim (Arab) society and the colonial mosaic-society model. These two essentialist imaginations of Syria underlay the demands for decentralization, too. An essentialist understanding of Islamic law and all kinds of orientalist clichés attached to it formed the backbone of the Regionalists' view of the "majority." The idea of the Syrian (Arab) being "fanatical and intolerant [and] having [a] tendency to persecute" illustrates the political imaginations of the Regionalist Movements and their call for French protection.[648] Regardless of the political, economic, and social context, the acts of violence are subsumed under the same category: oppressed Christians under the Muslim yoke. Reports and articles on Jazira in *al-Bachir* reflected and endorsed this mindset as seen in the quotation below:

> Un obstacle qui s'affirme en Syrie plus irréductible qu'ailleurs: le caractère propre, immanent, inchangé, fige de Loi musulmane. Les institutions juridiques, nous ne pouvons dire civiles, et les institutions religieuses ont une même source, et depuis des siècles coulent dans le même lit, le coran immuable. ….de la infériorité civique dans laquelle ont été tenues les minorités chrétiennes, de la leur sujétion à des exigences qui révoltent leur conscience. De là, a leur faveur, l'institution d'un protectorat chrétien exerce par la France et qui réussi à garantir leur vie sinon leur égale civil et sociale durant les années.[649]

The Arab nationalists challenged the "wild Syrian (Arab)" image by bringing in examples of tolerance from Sunni-Arab history, for instance the Umayyad or Abbasid caliphates. The genesis of different religions on the Syrian land for 4,000 years was also presented as a manifestation of diverse aspects of Syrianness, which has come to be equated to Arabness ("Le Syrien aujourd'hui ne veut être qu'Arabe et la tolérance chez les Arabes est une tradition.")[650]

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[648] Jérôme et Jean Tharaud, *Alerte en Syrie* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1937), p. 174.
[649] Al-Bachir. 25.02. 1938.
[650] Syrie 1938, Office National Arabe, Damas, 1938, p. 6.

Similar to the years shortly before the establishment of the French mandate regime in Syria and Lebanon in 1921, the mosaic society model–based arguments reached their peak on the eve of the Franco-Syrian treaty negotiations: each so-called isolated religious group was assumed to have "pre-modern and atavistic qualities," while the relationship between these groups was claimed to be one of "conflict and violence."[651] All sorts of orientalist clichés accompanied these arguments: the Christian Mediterranean civilization vs. Asian Islam was only one of them.[652] The argument of the "myth of Syrian unity" (*le mythe de l'unité Syrienne*) and reminders about the French "preoccupation of protecting certain religious and political communities in Syria" were overtly employed by the Regionalists and their adversaries in order to *justify* both the former's claim to rule and the continuation of the French rule in the Levant. Raymond O'Zoux's manipulative argument affirms this point: "France has not come to 'divide to rule' like the Muslims always tend to argue, but it divided to isolate and lessen the existing fanaticism."[653] Several historical analogies between the loss of Cilicia, southern Turkey (and later Antioch), and a possible loss of Jazira to Turkey and Italy were made by the anti-treaty groups in order to demonstrate that the loss of the latter would be to the detriment of the French empire, just as the former were.[654]

In the coming years, the response of the Syrian Arab nationalists against the mosaic model and regionalism as its political project would gain ethnically more exclusive tones, as exemplified by the quotation below:

> All the ethnographers, all the historians, agree on the persistence of the Semitic race on that land … Druze, Hauranis, Alaouties, Jazirans have always been Arab, Arabism has intruded on their conception of life and thinking, and uniformed their aspirations and oriented their evolution towards communal national ideal … the Syrians have suffered under foreign domination for thousands of years … those who do not want to recognize blood fraternity between the habitants of Syria will be forced to accept it in front of common suffering and aspirations.[655]

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[651] Jacques Weulersse, in one his speeches to the Groupe d'études de l'islam, goes even further by identifying mass violence with the Orient: "L'orient avait résolu à sa manière ce problème: c'était le solution de *pogrom*." *Ce problème* being the enrichment of the Christians at the expense of Muslims, in other words class differentiation within society. M. Jacques Weulersse, "Aspects Permanents du Problème Syrien, La Question des Minorités," *Politique Etrangère*, 1 Février 1936, p. 32.
[652] Robert de Beauplan, *Où va la Syrie* (J. Tallandier: Paris, 1931), pp. 31-35.
[653] As early as 1928 Raymond O'Zoux writes that "what we call vaguely as Syria is not a unity, but it is a mosaic of traditions, beliefs, and divergent tendencies. Pleasing everyone in those conditions is impossible" (reproduction of an article in *l'Echo de Paris* in *Le journal l'Orient*, 16 December 1928).
[654] "Intérêts et Devoirs de la France en Syrie," Conférence prononcée à Paris par le Comte Cressaty, 3 March 1939 en le Salle de Société de Géographie sous le Présidence de Monsieur Louis Marin, Ancien Ministre, p. 17.
[655] Syrie 1938, Office National Arabe, Damas, 1938, pp. 9-10.

Amid the heated discussions and violent incidents of 1938, when both parties were rivals for power and domination over their own communities as well as others, Najib al-Rayyes, a fervent Damascene Arab nationalist columnist, listed the markers of majority-ness (and thus the claim to power) in one of his articles as follows: power of wealth (*tharwa*), social solidarity (*asabiyya*), land (‘*aradi*), numerical superiority (*raqm*), and ancientness (*qudm*). Obviously, these markers were meant to challenge the minority claims to rule in the autonomously administered regions of Syria.

Briefly, on the one hand the Arab nationalists subverted the French politics of difference as revealed in the majority–minority rights debate through appealing to a political definition of belonging (on the basis of supporting the Arab cause for full independence rather than a decentralized colonial administration on the basis of ethnic and religious difference); however, they could not escape from the ethnic or religious basis of national belonging and defined the majority–minority opposition as such due to the colonial mediation in the re-formation of these notions.

The Regionalist Movement in the French Jazira: A Critical Historical Account

A brief history of the events

The autonomy movement in Jazira was a local response of the Jaziran Francophile elites to the (hesitant) *revision* in the French colonial politics of difference.[656] It was no less a response to the Arab nationalist centralization attempts to incorporate Jazira into the Syrian national space. The regionalist movement came at a moment when the economic, ideological, and political implications of the new treaty began threatening (and indeed had begun to alter) the economic, social, and political dynamics in the region. In this sense, the autonomists were addressing two groups: firstly, the National Bloc government in Damascus and their handful of representatives in Jazira; and secondly the “new-French,” whose colonial policy changes would eventually lead to the abandonment of its fundamental colonial mission in the Levant, namely to act as “la protectrice sur des Chrétiens du Levant.” The regionalists demanded the continuation of the status quo, namely the elite-dominated sectarian rule under the French mandate. In other words, they asked for the logical presumption of the sectarian patrimonial

[656] For the revision of the French colonial politics in Syria and Lebanon, see the interviews with High Commissioner M. Puaux, in Isaac Lipschitz, *La Politique de la France au Levant* (Paris: Editions A. Pedone, 1963), p. 41.

regime (as described in detail in the previous chapter) against the Arab nationalists aspiring for full independence within an Arab nationalist ideology swinging between civic and ethnic nationalism.

The leadership of the autonomist faction in Jazira consisted of certain Kurdish tribal leaders, secular/religious elites of the Armenian, Syriac, Chaldean, Protestant, Jewish, and especially Catholic groups, and relatively smaller number of Arab tribal leaders. The French Service Spéciaux officials, having vested interests in the region, and the Dominican missionaries openly supported the Regionalist Movement both logistically and intellectually against the explicit will of the Quai d'Orsay and the French High Commissariat in Beirut. As shown above, the latter followed a negotiatory policy with the Damascus government, thus disfavoured the Autonomist Movements all over Syria as a whole.[657] The Syriac and Armenian Orthodox clergy adopted a 'wait and see' tactic, especially until the Amouda events (1937), after which they gradually began embracing the Nationalist Bloc's unionist line.[658] This was especially obvious with Aphram Barsoum, the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch, who did not refrain from praising the colonial power and its protection of the "Christians of the Orient" through the Personal Status Law until 1934,[659] yet who after 1936 began embracing an implicit (yet not explicit) pro-Nationalist Bloc stance complaining about the "the over-visibility of the Catholics in Jazira."[660] The moderate and fence-sitting attitude of Aphram Barsoum is absolutely forgotten by the Syriacs today. This complex scene in Jazira (no more complicated, though, than in other parts of Syria) once again proves that religious and ethnic communities in Syria did not act as monolithic blocs in political affairs, despite the fact that French officials applied such thinking to the Syrians, seeing the Muslims as "majorities" and the Christians in particular as coherent "minorities" who were being uniformly disadvantaged in the treaty negotiations for political and ideological reasons. None of the communities in French-Syria were monolithic and univocal in their relations with the state and wider society;

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[657] MAE, Levant 1918-1940, Syrie-Liban, vol. 519, de Haut Commissaire de la République en Syrie et au Liban a Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, "Les minorités de Syrie," Beyrouth, 7 July 1937, p. 2. It is stated that France should be more hesitant in assuming its traditional role of protecting the minorities and take the necessary steps in order to develop a national feeling among the latter.

[658] The Tashnak committee of Aleppo sent instructions to the Tashnaks of Jazira recommending them to follow a "neutralité absolue" in the Jazira incidents. Aleppan patriarchate Armenian Orthodox, Mgr. Surmeyan sent the same instructions. CADN, Cabinet Politique, Box 574, no. 3641, Activité politique Arménien, Sûreté Générale, information, Sûreté Alep 24.7, a/s des arméniennes Tachnags de Djézireh., Beyrouth 26 July 1937.

[659] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Syrie-Liban, Box 493, no. 1493, Ignatius Aphram, Patriarche syrien d'Antioche, Homs, Syrie, 30 Aout 1934.

[660] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Syrie-Liban, Box 602, no. 1357, de l'Ignatius Aphram, Patriarche Syrien Orthodoxe d'Antioche et de tout l'Orient à Monsieur Daladier Président du Conseil des Ministre de la République Française, Homs, l 6 Juin 1938.

groups in each community were competing for domination. Today's Jaziran-Christians' memories, then, *re-interpret* the 1930s' contested definitions of being a Syrian Christian within the present social and political context of 2000s.

The emergence of an organized Regionalist political movement in the French Jazira dates back to February 1936, just prior to the signing of the treaty between France and Syria. The Regionalist faction in Jazira had organized and qualified its demands when the Syrian delegation was negotiating the terms of the treaty in Paris in early 1936. Inclusion of the article on the "protection of minorities" and granting an autonomous status to Jazira similar to the one granted to the Sanjak of Alexandretta formed the initial demands of the Regionalists' autonomy programme which rallied in nearly all of main urban centres of Jazira, i.e. Qamishli, Hassake, Amouda, and Derik. The rival "unionist group" in Jazira was formed immediately afterwards. It was far less favoured and supported by the local Jaziran population. The unionist party was led by Daham al-Hadi, the leader of the major Arab tribe Shammar al-Khorsa, who had inscribed on his calling card the title "chief of the chiefs of the tribes of Jazira."[661] Evidently, an autonomous status to Jazira was not accorded in accordance with the Regionalists' demands. Soon after, on 9 September 1936, the Franco-Syrian treaty was signed in Paris and the general elections in Syria would be held at the end of November 1936.

Elections were also held in Jazira and four deputies were 'elected'. Three of them were from the urban notables rallying in the Regionalist camp, and the other Jaziran deputy to the Syrian parliament was Daham al-Hadi from the Nationalist Bloc's list. The two other candidates of the Nationalist Bloc, Abdulbaqi Nizameddin and Younan Hadaya, were not elected.[662] While Daham al-Hadi's deputyship was approved by the parliament, the approval of the credentials of the Regionalist Bloc deputies of Jazira, namely Sa'id Ishaq, Qaddour Bey, and Khalil Bey Milli were kept on hold by the nationalist Damascus government, an incident which increased apprehension among a big portion of the Jaziran urban and rural tribal notables from different ethnic and religious groups. Centralizing measures by the Damascus government, such as appointing inexperienced and arrogant Damascene governors and officers, dismissing local officials who were hostile to the Arab nationalist aspirations, improving security measures in the towns of Jazira through additional police forces, and

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[661] Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, p. 528.
[662] Abdulbaqi Nizameddin was one of the landowners in Qamishli and a rival of Qaddour Beg. There is no reliable information about how the elections were held in Jazira at a time when there was no reliable census or population figures.

disarming the local population, only added to the tension. Among the most significant of these centrally appointed non-Jaziran figures was the first governor of Jazira, Amir Bahjat al-Shihabi, an Istanbul-educated Damascene-Christian lawyer who was appointed to Hassaka in February 1937. He was followed by a district governor (*kaimakam*) to Qamishli and later by non-Jaziran officers and gendarmes. The governor was a Christian Aleppan lawyer who completed his studies in France but had no administrative experience. His being Christian did not ease the tension in Jazira. The new governor—being completely backed by the National Bloc government who at the time had to "compensate for the Bloc's ineffectiveness in confronting the Turks in the Sanjak of Alexandretta"[663]—had the short-sightedness and arrogance towards the local population.His shortcomings surfaced in his policy during the struggle for the leadership of the Arab tribe Tayy, after the leader of the tribe passed away in Beirut in November 1936. The new governor of Jazira supported a little-known leader without tribal legitimacy over the deceased's logical successor and his cousin Mohammad 'Abdarrahman, simply because 'Abdarrahman had close ties to the Shammar of Iraq who were the enemies of the pro-National Bloc unionist leader Daham al-Hadi.[664] The newly appointed Aleppan *kaimakam* of Qamishli sided with the governor, too. In 17 April 1937, the credentials of the Jaziran deputies were finally approved in Damascus following French involvement in the issue, the latter being threatened with a possible "Kurdish rebellion" by the Jaziran regionalist group. The tension between the local population and the Unionist Bloc in Jazira (which was backed by the Damascus government) increased tremendously due to the Tayy leadership issue—still unresolved by May 1937—in which the governor, who depended on Daham al-Hadi for information, favoured the little-known chief. After the meeting in the village called Topêz on 28 June, attended by the Christian notables, the leaders of the Kurdish tribes (Hevêrkan, Milli, Kikan, Mersini, Ashiti, Alian, Miran), and two Arab tribes (the Shammar of Zors and the Tayy), the first official declaration of the Regionalist Bloc calling for local administrative and financial autonomy in Jazira was ready to be sent to Hassaka, Damascus, Beirut, Paris, Geneva, and Rome.

Following the regionalist declaration, the new governor, Amir Bahjat al-Shihabi, did not only increase the security measures in the towns by bringing in new security forces and gendarmes; he also dismissed the mayor of Hassaka, Elias Mercho, and later arrested him along with another Armenian Catholic notable. Subsequent to this, the "Jaziran revolt" broke

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[663] Lt. Aymes, "La rivalité", p. 17.
[664] Lt. Aymes, "La rivalité", pp. 18-20.

out on 1 July 1937. The description of the commencement of the revolt comes from Msg. Hebbé; it is a description with an obvious religious undertone:

> Joseph Mamarbachi fired the first shot at 06.50 in the morning. At 07.05, all the bells of all the churches in Jazira were made to ring.[665]

The markets were closed. Gunfire was reported all over the place. Armed militias of the Regionalist faction, both Kurds and Christians, were in the streets of Hassaka and Qamishli, consigning the Syrian gendarmes to the governor's palace (*serail*). Four gendarmes were killed. The French army intervened to maintain order and the gendarmes who were brought in to Jazira were sent back to Aleppo. The tension in the region continued to rise, while the arms transfer to the region reached its peak.[666]

The most violent incident witnessed in Jazira during the mandate period was the "Amouda incident," which lasted from 28 July to 9 August 1937. A Kurdish and Arab joint-force, anti-autonomist and pro- National Bloc government, consisting of members of the Kurdish Daqquri and the Arab Jabbour and Shammar tribes attacked the Christian neighbourhood of Amouda, set it on fire and killed at least thirty Christians. Approximately the same number of Daqquri Kurds were killed in air raids by French military forces. The rival Kurdish tribe of Amouda, the Mersinis, played an important role in the rescue of the Christians. The Hassaka incidents on the eve of the Revolt, 1 July, followed by the Amouda incidents, created an extreme fervour towards the rebels (*mutamaradiyn*) and local French officers in the eyes of the Arab nationalists.[667] It evoked incompetence on behalf of the National Bloc government in Damascus.

The Amouda incident was controversial in the sense that both parties blamed the other for causing the events.[668] Arab nationalist papers blamed the Beirut papers, especially the Jesuit paper *al-Bashir*, and the local French officers for the provocation (*fitna*). As a whole, Jazira gained publicity as a dissident region among the Syrian public through this controversial

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[665] Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, Dossier 45, Hassatche Incidents, p. 2.
[666] Daham al-Hadi, 'Abdalbaqi Nizameddin, and Said Agha Daqquri were the main figures in the transfer of arms from Aleppo and Damascus to the unionist group in Qamishli and Amouda; Milli İbrahim Pasha in Ras al-'Ayn and Derik were the main centres where the Regionalists in Qamishli and Hassake acquired their arms.
[667] The Amouda incidents are referred to as "taqqa Amouda" by the locals and "fitna Amouda" (Amouda clashes [fitna is not provocation but something like civil war!), by the nationalist Arab press. The word "taqqa" comes from the sound "taq," most probably referring to the sound of the French air raids, the second biggest sound that the refugees had heard after the air raids of the Turkish army during the Sheikh Said Revolt.
[668] There is an enormous amount of documentation in Nantes and Archives Dominicanes about the Amouda incidents and the French military operations following the incidents.

event. Albeit misspelled and in strange combinations, the names of the leaders of the Regionalist group, Mgr. Hebbé, Michel Dome, Abdalahad Kerio, and Hadjo Agha frequently appeared in the nationalist Arab press as rebels.

Following the Amouda events, strict security measures were taken by the French. Limiting arms delivery to the Arab tribes who participated in the attacks and exile of the Kurdish tribe Daqquri which had pillaged the Christian property were some of the early steps (the Daqquri leadership was exiled first to Turkey, then to Iraq). The exile of the leaders of both the Regionalists and the Unionist groups was the most radical measure undertaken by the central French authorities. Most significantly, Mgr. Hebbé was exiled to Beirut where, throughout his regular meetings with the High Commissariat and several other senior French officers, he was given the message that the Christians should seek a "modus vivendi in Syria." This was followed by the replacement of the local French officers disfavouring the prospects of the treaty by more pro-treaty French officers, an initiative which created much disillusionment among the Regionalists. Moreover, the governor of Hassaka, Shihabi, and the *kaimakam* of Qamishli were also replaced by new ones.

Still, the Regionalist Movement continued to insist on local autonomy until the final breakdown of negotiations of the Franco-Syrian treaty in July 1939, making the following demands: that the governor of Jazira be a local personality and not a nominee of Damascus; that all administrative and judicial officials in Jazira be locals; that a representative of the High Commission be retained in the province; that the French army not be withdrawn and all rebels be amnestied.[669] Unlike the memories of the Christians today, complaints against the "Damascus-appointed officers" and their "violent and intransigent" attitudes would form one of the most recurring themes in the protest petitions sent by the Regionalists.

In the coming months, regionalists resorted to more symbolic actions, such as kidnapping the new Jaziran governor, another Christian from Damascus, Tawfiq Chamiyya. Despite the fact that he was released after a couple of days,[670] the Arab nationalists' rage towards the Jazirans, French, and the National Bloc (in particular Jamil Mardam Beg) increased exponentially after the kidnapping. Khoury argues that the Jaziran incidents partly inspired the exchanges between Jamil Mardam Beg and the Undersecretary of State at the Foreign Ministry, M. de Tessan, in December 1937, which culminated in additional securities for

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[669] Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, Dossier 52, Entretien de Monsieur Michel Dome président de la municipalité de Kamichlié avec Monsieur le Comte Ostrorog et les ministres Syriennes, 04.08.1937, p. 9. Khalid Bakdash, *maza fi al-Jazira?* 1939, pp. 27-28.

[670] The "welcoming attitude" of Chamiyya's hosts—namely the residences of the Kurdish and Christian regionalist leaders—as revealed in his personal memoirs proves the symbolic nature of the action!

Christian minorities and settled that Syria would rely on French technical cooperation for their organization.[671] These additional securities, together with Mardam Beg's, added to the existing fervour among the Arab nationalists. The third governor sent to Jazira in March 1938, Haydar Mardam Beg, prime minister Jamil Mardam Beg's first cousin who was married to a Christian woman, had to leave the region a month after his appointment due to a fifteen-day strike in Jazira against the Damascus government and a boycott of all government officers—shopkeepers even refused to sell bread to the government officers.[672] A self-government experiment began to be put into practice in Jazira, by putting up local tribunals. The skirmishes between the government, its representatives, and the Regionalists continued all through the summer of 1938. French flags covered the houses of Hassaka two months prior to HC Puaux's visit to Jazira in March 1938. 1,000 Syrian flags sent by the National Bloc office in Aleppo never reached Hassaka. After his visit, HC Puaux implicitly stated that there was need for decentralization and local autonomy in Jazira and in other autonomous regions; but no concrete steps were taken in accordance with this line. In February 1939, the "flag incident" in Qamishli—in which the Syrian flag was torn down and urinated on by one of the the pro-Regionalists following a fight between the gendarmes and the latter, who later found refuge in one of the SR offices in the city—sharpened the 'majority consciousness' even more.

On July 2 1939, the Franco-Syrian treaty was rejected in parliament and Jazira along with two other governorates was granted a special regime status under direct French rule. The French cancellation of the treaty accompanied the Turkish annexation of the Sanjak of Alexandretta (1939) whose gradual and evident loss was one of the factors that heightened the anxiety among the Arab nationalists that Jazira might also be subject to the same destiny. Several articles from the Arab nationalist press verify this point. Najeb al-Rayyes, in one his articles after the abolition of the treaty, wrote the following words:

> The alteration of the treaty will imply the loss of Jazira after we lost the *liwa* [Alexandretta]. Soon, the name "Syrian Arab Republic" may become "The Republic for dispersed and compact ethnic and religious minorities" [*al-jumhurriyya lil aqalliyat al-jinsiyya wa al-diniyya al-mutafarriqa al-mutajamma'a*].[673]

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[671] Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, p. 487.
[672] Ibid., p. 532.
[673] Najib al-Rayyes, "Qunbulatu al-'Amid, Yakfina min al-Mu'ahada" [The Major's Bomb, Enough with the Treaty], 'Suqut al-Frank wa Daya' al-Liwa' [The Fall of the Frank and the Loss of the Sanjak], *Selected Works: Suriyya al-Istiqlal 1936 – 1946*, vol. 3, (Beirut: Riyad al-Rayyes, 1994), pp. 239-241.

The disowning of the treaty caused extreme frustration among the majority of the Syrian Arab nationalists who aspired for independence. It also brought the end of the Nationalist Bloc as a political party—if not of its leader Jamil Mardam Beg, who was able to make a last minute populist move with a criticism of the Personal Status Law. The tone of the Arab nationalist press became increasingly reactionary after the non-ratification news reached Damascus, as reflected in an Najib al-Rayyes piece written from Dayr al-Zor, the seat of the Arab nationalist activity in eastern Syria:

> Between me and *Hassatche*[674], the capital of provocation, disobedience, and conspiracy against the National Rule and the Syrian treaty, there is a long distance where I do not witness the celebrations held by the disobedients [‘*usat*] to honour the failure of the French-Syrian friendship. And I do not hear the bells of the church of priest Hebbé while holding his “heavenly mass” to celebrate the speech of the High Commissariat and the delegate of the HC in Jazira, and announcing in his official position and his great responsibility that the treaty must be modified in military matters and minority guarantees.[675]

The Christians’ oblivion of this controversial period should be thought of in relation to the increasing distance and polarization between the French Jazira and the Syrian establishment discourse in the late 1930s in their struggle for dominance. Their oblivion and selective memories aim to close up this distance.

The Regionalist Bloc: Constituents, Ideology, Politics

The French adherents of the Regionalist movement labelled the group the “bloc Kurdo-Chrétien” in order to emphasize its non-sectarian character. However, the autonomist group was not a coherent bloc, nor an organic unity. Different personalities both among the leadership and the supporters had somewhat different political, economic and social motivations in their engagements, thus derived non-identical meanings from the fundamental demands of the movement. (The same is true for the adversaries of the movement at different moments, too.)

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[674] Hassake is pronounced as Hassache in Bedouin accent. The Arab nationalists usually adopted the Bedouin usage when they referred to Hassake. Hassaka is the capital of the governarate and has become the city of official Arab nationalism nowadays.
[675] Ibid.

The most significant commonality between the leaders of the autonomy movement was that they were without exception the Francophile elites of the French Jazira, the beneficiaries of the French regime, both materially and symbolically. The three important figures in the Kurdish faction of the moment were Hadjo Agha of the Hevêrkan tribe, Qaddour Beg the former *kaimakam* of Nusaybin, and Khalil Bey Ibrahim Pasha of the Milli tribe. Hadjo Agha established himself as the chief representative of the Kurds in Jazira and maintained relations with the Christian notables in the movement. He held the post of the presidency of the Supreme Committee of Jazira in 1938, and appeared as one of the two or three spokespersons of the movement along with the general vicar of the Syriac Catholic Patriarch for Jazira, Mgr. Hanna Hebbé, and Michel Dome, the mayor of Qamishli, who was an Armenian Catholic from Mardin by origin. Qaddour bey, a prominent figure in Qamishli, on whose land the city was founded, and Khalil Bey Ibrahim Pasha Milli were two of the three elected deputies of Jazira in the National Assembly in Damascus; Sa'id Ishaq, a Syriac Orthodox Christian from Amouda, originally from Qal'at Mar'a in Mardin, was the third. Khalil Bey İbrahim pasha also claimed authority over the Kurds because of the supposed superiority of the Milli tribe, placing himself in opposition to other tribal leaders like Hadjo Agha.[676] Eventually, the Millis changed their strategy and rallied to the National Bloc government, together with another Kurdish tribe from Hama, the Barazi. Both the Milli and the Barazi continued sending key figures to the Syrian national government and the military in the 1940s and 50s.[677] A similar story holds true for the Kurdish Daqquri tribe of Amouda. The grandson of Said agha Daqquri and several other leading members of the tribe mention the conflict between the "autochthon" Daqquri (of Sa'id Agha) and the "newcomer" Hevêrkan (of Hadjo Agha) and the Mersini tribe from the same region. While the Hevêrkan and Mersini stood with the Regionalist movement, the Daqquri together with the other Arab tribes of the region rallied for the Arab nationalist cause mainly on religious grounds, a historical fact which is highly regretted nowadays.[678]

Other autonomist Kurdish leaders of Jazira were Naif Bey Mustafa Pasha of Miran, Abdu Agha Merei of Alian, Abdul Agha Khello of Mersini, Naif Hasan of Milli, Hadji Darwish of Kikan, Ahmad Agha Ayo for the Yezidis, and Abdalaziz Husayn of the Ashiti tribes. The Shahin Beg brothers supported the autonomist cause in the *caza* of Jarablus.

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[676] Jordi Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, p. 30.
[677] Ibid.
[678] Interview by the author, May 2007, Amouda, Syria.

The Christian factions of the mentioned Kurdish tribes also stood with the political stance of their Kurdish leader, although this rule would start changing slightly after 1937, thanks to the "sectarianism from below" of one of the Christian *mukhtar*s of Hevêrkan in Tirpespi, the town owned by Hajo agha.

The most outspoken members of the Christian faction of the Regionalist Bloc were as follows. In Qamishli: Mgr. Hebbé, Michel Dome (mayor), Gallo Chabo, Malké Asmar, Moussa Esso, Artin Mouradian, Leon Karanfilian, Daoud Aziz, Joseph Mamarbachi, Elias Terzibachi, and Taher Bey Mardini. In Hassake: Abdalahad Qerio (mayor) and Elias Mercho. In Amouda: Elia Sabbagh and Sa'id Ishak. In Ras al-Ayn: Habib Mariamo and Boghossian. In Derbessié: Naim efendi Karazivan (mayor) and Moussa Ghizzo (*mukhtar* of the Jacobites). In Derik: Selin Noamo and Hadji Bedros Bedikian.

The Arab tribes who embraced the Regionalist line were the following: Sheikh Mizar of the Shammar al-Zor tribe, Mohammad and Abderrahman of the Tayy tribe, the Beggara and Sharabiyyin tribes. The last two worked for the Christian money-lenders as shepherds.[679]

The Arab tribes that rallied to the National Bloc cause were Daham al-Hadi, the chief of the Shammar al-Khorsa tribe; Jamil Muslat, chief of the Jabbour tribe; and Abdalrezzak Hasso, chief of a faction of the Tayy tribe called Reshid. The Arab Tayy tribe was eternally divided between the partisans and opponents of the ambitious leader of the Shammar al-Zor, Daham al-Hadi, who had lately became a partisan of Arab national cause in the Jazira region.

As for the Kurdish tribes in the unionist bloc, these were: the Daqquri tribe of Said Agha, the Milli tribe of Khalil Beg, the Achiti tribe of Hadji Ali, and the Pinar Ali tribe of Husayn Ali.

It was on 4 March 1936, under the tent of Jamil Muslat Pasha, that the Regionalist Faction formally gathered for the first time, formulated their programme and drafted their list of demands to be sent to the HC and to the head of the Syrian government. Strangely enough, Jamil Muslat Pasha is now one of the most praised chief among the Arab tribes in Jazira for his generosity along with Hadjo Agha in the Christians' post-memories.[680] He is also praised on the basis of his pro-Arab stance ever since.

A marginalized report submitted to the Damascus government–appointed Investigation Commission formed after the Amouda incidents substantiates the claim made above that the Regionalist leaders were the beneficiaries and had a vested interested in the continuation of the colonial status quo, whereas the pro-Nationalist Bloc group in Jazira claimed and

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[679] Lt. Aymes, "La rivalité," p. 10.
[680] This fact points to the irreducibility of remembering and oblivion solely to political cleavages and belongings.

attempted to accrue their own share in Jazira. This long report, which consists of the grievances of the Regionalist Group about the new administration in Jazira, provides striking details about the socioeconomic aspect of the Jaziran issue. The political economy aspect of the clashes between the government-appointed administrators and the local Jaziran mayors, "the seigneurs of the old regime," is really striking. Tens of pages in the report are reserved to the grave conflict over land ownership between the Regionalist group and the Syrian government–appointed new administration in Jazira. The report displays that the real estates or immovable properties that had belonged to the Francophile landowners or their subcontractors and their *mukhtar*s, yet without any tithes, were being appropriated by the Bloc government–appointed officers in the post-treaty years. Even the riverbed of the Djagh Djagh River was being changed so to run through the newly owned villages of a Nationalist Bloc officer. Or very often the new administration was appointing a pro-Bloc *mukhtar* through which the former would control the economic surplus and the inhabitants of the village.[681]

Another account that captures "the clash of interests" aspect of the conflict in the region comes from a non-local French inspector from the Land and Estates Office in Damascus (*Services Fonciers et Domaines*) who arrived to Jazira in early 1936, but was able to stay only for twenty days upon encountering the hostile attitude of the big *seigneurs* of the region to the cadastral survey:

> … after all, there is neither political regionalism nor extreme nationalism prevailing in the region. There are certain regulations and laws that they [probably he is referring to the Kurdish/Arab tribal leaders who favour the Autonomist political line] look forward to getting rid of and being abolished; or that they aspire to acquire or liquidate the authority in order to assume the control of the immigrants and share the land like booty; in order to expel the Arab tribes off their pasturage lands so that the chefs of the tribes seize the lands from their fellow brothers and they secure the traditional protection (*khoua*) and its benefits. These aspirations are upheld by and in the profit of a small group of notables. Whoever lays claim to law against the above situation is considered a Nationalist; whoever intends to qualify and decide within the confines of general will is labelled as anti-Regionalist. From the day we started the arbitrage, everyone we met marked out his claim on the basis of the magnitude of his Regionalist manifestations and demanded one's Regionalist belonging to be the sole determiner in the decisions of the arbitrator.[682]

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[681] CADN, Cabinet Politique, E Levant, Box 503, no.1059/C.E, Sûreté Générale, Situation en Djézireh, Confidentiel, 1 Octobre 1937.

[682] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Fonds Beyrouth, Box 413, inventaire 6, Dossier 3 "Mouvement autonomiste de Djézireh de 1936," lettre du conseiller financier au Délègue du Haut-commissaire de Damas, 24 Juin 1936. L. Dillemann, "Les Français en Haute-Djézireh (1919-1939)", *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer*, 66 (1979), pp. 33-58.

Still, the above analysis is misleading in its portrayal of the conflict in terms of private interests vs. general will. The Arab newspapers also complained about the economic privileges granted to the leaders of the Regionalists by the local French authorities (such as tax exemptions, absence of land registration, transfer of wealth), but the conflict under scrutiny is fundamentally a clash of interests between the *old* elites in Jazira and the *new* elites in Damascus and their adversaries in Jazira—but *not* a rivalry over economic and political power between the feudal lord and the local society. A socioeconomic conflict between the subalterns and the elites of Jazira, in particular within the multi-religious and multi-ethnic tribal structures, would soon arise, yet in a sectarian articulation.

Moreover, the divergence between the Unionist and the Regionalist elites of Jazira was not as clear-cut as was imagined by either the non-local French adherents or the formal self-representations of the movement. There has always been a certain dose of *interlinkage* between the elites of the two politically rivalling groups. An example proving the presence of a class linkage between the members of the politically rivalling elites comes from Ras al ‘Ayn. Habib Meryemo, the leader of the Regionalists in Ras al-‘Ayn, a Syriac Catholic merchant, was the former warden (*majordome*) of the sons of İbrahim pasha of Milli, who rallied to the Arab Nationalist cause soon after the ratification of the credentials of the Jaziran deputies. Khalil Bey Milli and Habib Meryemo were commercial partners in the opening of the villages on the western banks of the Khabur to agriculture. They employed peasants from the Arab Beggara tribe. The expenses of installation were made by Meryemo. He also used to get the yields of his partner, Khalil. Khalil and Habib were in rival political groups during the Jazira events; the former spent lots of money in the Unionist cause (!) and Habib mortgaged his two villages to another Christian. After the Jaziran events were over, they reconciled once again in 1939. Khalil bey became deputy to the Syrian parliament in 1943 and rented his villages to the Asfur u Najjar families, two renowned Syriac (capitalist) farmer families, originally from Diyarbakir. But Meryemo continued to infringe his owner’s part. In 1944, he sent some new peasants to build new houses on Khalil’s land, but this time he hits to another Christian, namely the new landowner bourgeoisie of the region, even of Syria, Asfur u Najjar. Asfur u Najjar appealed to the Kurdish Milli tribe to demolish the houses of the Meryemo. [683]

Therefore, viewing the Christians of Jazira as a coherent and uniformly disadvantaged community contradicts historical fact. The colonial view about the religious minorities in

[683] Institut Kurde, Rondot papers, “Etude de Comportement Politique et Social d’un Confédération de Tribus de Haute Mésopotamie, Confédération Composée d’Eléments Ethniques et Religieux Différents “Les Milli” ”, 3 April 1946, Beirut, p. 22.

Syria—that "whatever the political scene is transformed into in Jazira, it will be to their detriment"[684]—underestimates the Christian groups' agency in carving out their own future. However, as in the above example, and as the Regionalist Bloc–HC confrontations in the coming years would demonstrate, different groups and individuals sought to appropriate the majority–minority or unity–regionalism debates in different ways in order to redefine *the* community to their *own* advantage.

Within the Regionalist group, political tension was not rare—especially between the Christian and Kurdish factions of the movement. Hadjo Agha was accused by his Christian allies, particularly by Mgr. Hebbé, of exploiting the Autonomy Movement for his own ends, in particular of disseminating among the rural Kurdish population nationalist political ideas that did not fit the credentials of the Regionalist movement. The Kurdish flag in Hadjo's residence in Hassake and his involvement with the Kurdish nationalist movement in French-Syria-Lebanon were presented as proofs of his "exploitation" and "manipulation."[685] He was criticized again by the same group for "creating ties of solidarity between different Kurdish groups (*éléments*) in different parts of Syria and assembling them under the banner of Kurdish racism."[686]

Some of the pamphlets of the Regionalist Bloc give the impression that there were two different and at times contradictory agendas among the Regionalists, swinging between Kurdish nationalist demands for autonomy and a pro-Christian movement. The Kurdish nationalist refugees, Bedirxan brothers would separately work out their nationalist project; Hadjo Agha would open a Kurdish cultural centre in Amouda for the development of Kurdish nationalist activities; Mgr. Hebbé would work with the French SR and inform them about the Kurdish nationalist threats; and the regionalist Michel Dome would make a statement referring to the

> non-Muslim minorities here in the midst of the desert who are 850 km away from Beirut and who are left to the mercy of pillars and assassinations at the hands of the Bedouins who are agitated by certain groups in Damascus.[687]

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[684] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Fonds Beyrouth, Box 503, de la Haut Commissariat, Aperçu sur la situation politique dans les territoires de l'Euphrate, 4 Octobre 1937, Beyrouth.
[685] Al-Bachir, 14-18 Août 1938.
[686] Jordi Tejel Gorgas, "Les Kurdes de Syrie, de la 'dissimulation' à la "visibilité?" *REMMM*, 115-116 (2008), p. 121.
[687] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Fonds Beyrouth, Box 503, Dossier 1, no. 9492 and Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, Dossier 52 "Entretien de Monsieur Michel Dome, Président de la Municipalité de Kamechlié avec Monsieur le Comte Ostrorog et les Ministres Syriens à Damas," 4.8.1937, p. 3.

This incoherence, I contend, was inevitable and gives a clue to the ideological weakness and inherent contradictions of the elite-sectarianism by which Jaziran autonomy movement was to a large extent informed.

According to its adherents, the Jaziran autonomy movement was a "minority movement against the majority rule." One of the first publications of the autonomy movement was a booklet of over one hundred pages entitled "La revolution de la Djézireh: Juillet–Aout 1937," written in very eloquent French and which, in part, aimed to "sell" Jazira to the Western audience through descriptions of the history, geography, economy, and demography of the region. The booklet opens as follows:

> The regionalist group represents itself as "a total movement where the whole population has revolted to show its discontent with the nationalist government of Damascus" [*un mouvement générale où toute la population s'est révoltée pour manifester son mécontentement du gouvernement nationaliste de Damas*].[688]

The hundreds of petitions and pamphlets published afterwards adopted this territory-based regionalist discourse. They stressed the multi-ethnic and unanimous character of the movement. They pointed to the Jaziran peoples' agonies following the administrative incorporation of the region under the authority of a nationalist government in Damascus. In the words of the mayor of Qamishli, Michel Dome:

> Jazira is inhabited by Kurds and other sects of Christians and Arabs who have nothing in common with Damascus and is horrified by the yoke of the latter.[689]

However, the fact that the most outspoken people in the Regionalist movement were from the Christian faction—Mgr. Hebbé, the Syriac Catholic priest of Hassake, other Syriac Catholic notables in Qamishli and Hassake, and with the Syriac Catholic patriarch Tappouni's endless support—would easily undermine the claims of regional Jaziran identity. The Beirut-based Jesuit daily *al-Bashir*'s frequent despatches about the Christians of Jazira and their

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[688] *La Question Syrienne, La Vérité Sur Les Événements De La Djézireh, Aperçu Historique Par Un Témoin Oculaire, Publie Par Comité Général De Défense De La Haute Djézireh* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1937), p. 6.

[689] Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, Dossier 45 and Dossier 68, La Question de la Djézireh, Titre VII, "Les Droits de Damas et de la France sur la Djézireh", p. 2.

demand for protection (from the "violent Muslims") would obviously translate the regionalist discourse to a pro-Christian one in the eyes of its non-Jaziran Catholic r/leaders. The petitions and declarations of the Christian advocates of the movement, like the Dominican missionaries or *al-Bashir*, were full of all kinds of orientalist clichés about Islam.[690] Like the French colonial discourse, they wrote the history of Christians/Christianity into the history of violence, where the Christians were depicted as the victims under the tyranny of the Muslims. In several pamphlets, an un-nuanced and decontextualized understanding of violence is conflated with the whole history of Christians, regardless of political, economic, and social context. The conjoining of the 1915 massacres and the violent incidents of the post-treaty years is such a case, as displayed in the petition below, addressed to the colonial authorities:

> Without guaranteeing special status to the minorities among whom the memories of the brutal scenes of WW1 massacres are still alive, you cannot claim to establish their trust towards the Nationalist government whose first extremist attempts [of assimilation] are known to us all.[691]

A textual analysis of the pamphlets, reports, interviews, and newspaper despatches of the Regionalist bloc, in particular its Christian faction, demonstrates that the concept of minority in the regionalist political discourse is usually employed as a marker of Christian victimhood and Muslim violence in French Jazira. This is at least how the movement is represented to the publics *outside* Jazira. Unfortunately, we do not have knowledge about the aspirations of its subaltern supporters in Jazira. But it is obvious that tribal, communal, and local belongings played a far more important role in the motivations of the Jaziran adherents of the movement.

How did the Kurdish partisans and the Arab adherents of the Regionalist movement fit into the notion of minority contested by the pro-Christian subgroup? Or better, how did the "Muslim Kurds and Arabs" appropriate the notion of minority in Jazira? It is again through the discourse of minorities that the Muslim Kurdish or Arab elites were involved in the Regionalist movement. The struggle of the Jaziran multi-religious elites against the centralizing tendency of the Arab nationalist government and the incorporation of Jazira into

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[690] From the *al-Bachir* article: "Un obstacle qui s'affirme en Syrie plus irréductible qu'ailleurs: la caractère propre, immanent, inchangé, fige de Loi musulmane. Les institutions juridiques, nous ne pouvons dire civiles, et les institutions religieuses ont une même source, et depuis des siècles coulent dans le même lit, le coran immuable. … de la infériorité civique dans laquelle ont été tenues les minorités chrétiennes, de la leur sujétion à des exigences qui révoltent leur conscience. De là, a leur faveur, l'institution d'un protectorat chrétien exerce par la France et qui réussi à garantir leur vie sinon leur égale civil et sociale durant les années."

[691] *Syrie 1938 ... Les faits* ,"Les Minorités: Le Droit Intégral à la Vie Nationale", p. 37. The booklet is a collection of some articles that appeared in the Jesuit daily *al-Bashir*.

a Damascus-centred independent Syria was articulated in terms of "le problème des minorités."[692] The discourse of minorities provided the Jaziran elites with a legitimate medium to articulate their political and economic discomfort and their apprehensions about the Nationalist Bloc government in Damascus.

Arguably, the movement's regionalist discourse was more of a strategic policy choice by the region's elites, who claimed to represent undifferentiated religious/ethnic groups. Their imagination of Jazira was as a conglomerate of mutually exclusive and undifferentiated religious and ethnic groups in need of a "neutral French governor to distribute justice among people and control the regional affairs unlike the Damascus government which only divides the population."[693] Based on the colonial standpoint that a united Syria is only a creation of the mind, an "illusion" (*fantôme*),[694] they defined themselves at times as Christian minorities (against the Muslims), or as a Kurdish majority in the region (against the Arabs), or as Kurdish *and* Christian minorities (against the Syrian-Arabs). It was on these premises that they demanded from the colonial authority the protection of their minority rights. Against the assimilationist perspective of the Syrian Arab nationalists, who tended to subsume the ethnic and religious differences under Arabness,[695] the Jaziran autonomists highlighted the *difference* (as non-Muslims and non-Arabs) and singled out an ahistorical and static understanding of "minority." Those who benefitted from the French politics of the elite-dominated sectarian system in Jazira, namely the "*chefs naturels*" or pro-French elites of both the Kurdish and Christian communities, called for the continuation of the French politics of difference in Syria. Nearly a decade after their arrival in Syrian Jazira, the Christian elites in particular had noted that sectarianism was indeed a vehicle for political, social, and economic empowerment under the French mandate and they agreed on a common formula to sustain the status quo.

Sectarianism was not an elite ideology by definition, nor was the Jaziran movement restricted to the tribal or religious/secular leaders. The subalterns of the region could just as well appropriate sectarianism for their own interests, and that is what happened within the multi-religious Hevêrkan tribe. One petition, written by one of the Christian *mukhtar*s of Hevêrkan (*le section Chrétien de la tribu Hevêrkan*), is a good example of "sectarianism from

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[692] *Al-bashir* is full of exemplary articles about the "question des minorités Chrétiennes" in which it promotes the idea of a French guarantee for the rights of Christian communities.
[693] Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, Dossier 43, "La Manifeste de la Djézireh," p. 2.
[694] Jean et Jérôme Tharaud, *Alerte en Syrie* (Paris: Plon, 1937), p. 19, 21.
[695] For a brief summary of the Arab nationalist thesis on the minority question, see *Syrie 1938* (Office National Arabe de Recherches et d'Informations, Damas 1938).

below."[696] It manifests the ways in which the modern minority discourse of the post-treaty years was translated as a tool for political, social, and economic empowerment by non-elites. Never reverting to orientalist stereotypes about Islam or the Arabs, the petition starts with a brief description about the "close relationship" between the leader of the Christian section of the tribe, Melke Chenom, and Hadjo Agha especially regarding political issues, while concerning religious issues, the petition states, each group relies only on its own leader. The petition starts with a distorted version of the demographic composition of the Hevêrkan tribe and continues as such:

> At the time of our emigration to Syria in 1926, we joined the Muslim section of the Hevêrkan, which was in absolute *minority* in the tribe. Having been received by Lieutenant Terrier and installed at Qubur al-Bid, Terrier provided us with "30 villages" in the name of the tribe of Hevêrkan. "Encouraged and exhilarated" by the confidence that we have given to Hadjo and by acknowledging the hospitality and services that we have rendered him, Hadjo Agha has registered 4 villages, Koubour al-bid, Dridjié, Khezmok and Merdahm, in his name and in the name of his family, without the knowledge of the Christian section, which is indeed the true holder of an important part of the land under question. Not satisfied with that flagrant usurpation that he registered in his own name with a government degree, he had the audacity to make us leave "his territories" that we have made flourish in at the cost of 100 human lives and financial sacrifices.[697]

We do not have sufficient information to trace the destiny of Melke Chenom, but several intelligence reports from the late 1930s inform us about the protests of the landholders against the cadastre surveys, which confirm the argument that the regionalist movement was informed by "sectarianism from above."[698] As for sectarianism from below, it was driven primarily by the post-colonial Syrian states through the unequal communalist system. The memories of Jaziran Christians are the best proof that sectarianism from below is a process that is still ongoing.

Obviously, the discourse of minorities was the fruit of the same cultural and political imagination from which the anti-colonial and unionist Arab nationalist ideology of the 1930s was borne. The regionalist elites aspired to advance their economic and political position as promised and granted by the colonial politics of difference, whereas the Arab Nationalists aimed to replace it with the nationalist politics of difference. Underlying these political projects was the indispensable economic aspect. If the former was informed by the French

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[696] For sectarianism from below, see Max Weiss, "Institutionalizing Sectarianism".
[697] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Box 572, Kamichlié, 1.8.1936, à son excellence Monsieur de HC de la R.F auprès de Syrie et du Grand Liban Beyrouth.
[698] For sectarianism from above, see Max Weiss, "Institutionalizing Sectarianism", Introduction.

colonial discourse, then, in Chatterjee's words, the latter was a derivative discourse.[699] There was an important difference between the two, though. Arab nationalist ideology was becoming the dominant and founding ideology of the post-colonial Syrian state, while the Sunni-Arabs of Syria were obviously becoming the "majority" with a restless claim for political and social domination over those whom they viewed as the "minority." The next section is about the role of the Jaziran regionalist movement in the re-formulation of the notion of "minority" in Syria.

Regionalists in the Eyes of the Arab Nationalists: A 'Non-Movement'

The above section aimed to present the way in which the notion of "minority" was used by those who were engaged in a politics of minorities, i.e. the Jaziran regionalists. The following section will demonstrate the ways in which the notion of minority–majority was re-defined by the Arab nationalists in the 1930s and how the Arab nationalists claimed their majority-ness through reappropriating "les minorités" in Jazira. My basic intention in introducing the competition between these two groups in the 1930s is to draw links with the processes of memory-making and different modes of memory in today's Jazira. The last section of this chapter is devoted to the latter task.

First of all, the fact that the Regionalist movements appealed both to the French colonial power and the local Syrian audience made the Arab nationalists play on two different fronts in their responses to the Regionalists: both to the French and to the Regionalists. My focus below will be on the repercussions of the Jaziran Regionalist Movement in the Syrian public space.

It should be stated that the Arab nationalists, once again, relied on a "good French–bad French" distinction in their treatment of the Jaziran question. In the report drafted by the Arab government–formed Investigation Commission about the Amouda incidents, the Regionalist movement was described as a "plot by ultra-imperialist French officers and military officers who aspire for the *ancien regime* and the local leaders who are only their puppets."[700] The report evidently addressed the "good French" of the Front Populaire, but not really the local Jaziran population. As suggested by its choice of terminology, it denounced the "bad French,"

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[699] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
[700] The report is full of typos and misspellings of the names of places and people. CADN, Cabinet Politique, Fonds Beyrouth, Box 503, Rapport de la commission d'enquête sur les événements de Djézireh, 1 Septembre 1937, Damas.

namely the French military and the local French officers in Jazira. In another influential report written after the Amouda events, the leader of the Syrian Communist party, Khalid Bakdash, described the regionalist movement as a "fascist movement."[701]

Indeed, the dominant line of dealing with the Jaziran question was to deny the question and its implications, and to act as if it was a 'non-movement'. Almost none of the Syrian newspapers published the petitions of the regionalists in which their grievances and demands were stated; the few Syrian newspapers that did—like *Alifba*, which published a Jaziran Regionalist petition only once—were accused of legitimating the Regionalist political position and endorsing a federative Syria under foreign domination. The solution to the Jaziran problem was accordingly seen as "stronger governance of Jazira from Damascus." It was a widely held view among the pro-government newspapers that the regionalists were a "group [*farîq*] of Syriacs and some non-prominent personalities from the Kurds against the Nationalist rule [*al-hukm al-watani*]," and that "it was only a farce [*mahzala*] and insult [*haqara*] to the simple [minded] people of the region."[702] The reports drafted by government-appointed officers followed the same line of thinking—that is, underestimating the presence of a "Jaziran question" and transferring the blame onto "a few non-prominent local leaders who follow the orders of the colonial French." Significant for the purpose of this thesis is that the Arab nationalist stance on the events in the 1930s, especially in obscuring the magnitude of the movement, resonates with the present day Christians' remembrances of the movement.

The "non-movement" perspective was in complete conformity with the hesitant Arab nationalism of the late 1930s, swinging between a civic and ethnic understanding of national belonging. As mentioned above with regards to the minority issue, Arab nationalists vacillated between obscuring the "minority/majority" distinction and replacing it with a territorial understanding of nation; and following an assimilationist perspective in order to create an ethnic/religious definition of nation. Both of these trends were manifested in the Arab nationalist views on the Jaziran Regionalist Movement, and the repercussions of both exist in the memories of Jazirans today.

Significantly enough, the Arab nationalists cautiously avoided treating the Jaziran questions in "sectarian terms" (*sibgha ta'ifiyya*). The more they neglected to deal with the "sectarian question" and analyzed its roots and dynamics, the more they assimilated religious and ethnic differences under an agoraphobic Arabness.

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[701] Khalid Bakdash, *Maza fi al-Jazira?*(n.p, 1939).
[702] See al-qabs and al-incha' in March and April 1938.

Underestimating the weight and pull of the movement and the sectarian question was widely used by the Arab nationalists (and is still used today), and it served two purposes: firstly, it obscured the political legitimacy of a "minority movement" and the notion of "minority";[703] secondly, it was also a manoeuvre to accommodate the ex-refugee Jazirans (who were cohered as "les minorités" in the Regionalist discourse) into the Syrian nation. Thus, on the one hand they avoided confronting the sectarian question or the issue of minorities in a real sense; on the other hand, they strived to promote a non-ethnic and non-religious understanding of minority-ness. Accordingly, the Jazirans who were referred as the "minorité" as a whole in the Regionalists' discourse were differentiated into two distinct groups in the Arab nationalist rhetoric: the "nationalist majority" (*al-akthariyya al-wataniyya*) against the "evil dissident minority" (*al-aqalliyya al-mujrima wa al-mutamarrida*). The introduction of a political definition of the notion of majority/minority was an effective tool in order to incorporate the non-Muslim and non-Arab Jazirans into the Syrian nation. Thus, the nationalist elites paid and have still been paying extreme attention to keeping the distinction between the "*majority* of the *innocent* Jazirans" and the "*dissident minority*" intact.

This move contributed to the formation of a deep interrelation between the notions of political dissidence and foreigness, and vice versa in the Syrian Arab nationalist imagery, thanks to the fact that almost all of the Jaziran population was composed of refugees from Turkey and Iraq. Accordingly, the ex-refugees, the most recent of which were the Iraqi Assyrians, who earlier were accused of being "anti-Syrian French colons," were transformed into an impersonal, general signifier of "the majority of Jazira." They conjured up the image of "simple people who are *only* interested in their daily bread, but nothing else." This imagination of the "majority of Jazirans" with a "weak political agency" soon came to represent the whole of the Jazirans (*ahl al-jazira*). In a way, the Jazirans and Jazira entered the post-colonial era after they were castrated of political agency. The self-representation of Jazirans in one of the first books written on Jazira after independence confirms this point. I quote it below at the expense of referring to it a second time in the preceding pages:

> The Jaziran people hate [*yamqut*] politics and turn to agriculture with all of their energy … that does not mean they do not understand politics but we mean that they see that their working in politics spoils their agricultural work … and in case they sometimes raise their voice, they do so

[703] I will try to answer whether un-acknowledging the "sectarian question" is an anti-colonial and counter-hegemonic act in the conclusion of the thesis.

in order to demand construction [‘*imran*], improve agriculture, and guarantee the prosperity of the region.[704]

Prime Minister Sadallah Jabiri stated in one his speeches that the “ex-refugees of the 1920s have integrated and become like us, thus they should not be asking for a special treatment.” His words suggest that that the notion “refugee” has come to stand only for the minority (*aqalliyya*) and represents the “interest-seeker dissident rebels” (*mutamarridiyn ‘aqq*).[705] This reveals that minority-ness came to conjure up an image of political dissidence contesting the ideological hegemony of the discourse of “organic national harmony.” Thus, did Jazira become visible in the Syrian public through the “minority movement.” In a year’s time, the Damascus Arab nationalist daily *al-qabs* would be calling for the ultimate necessity of disciplining the (dissident) Jazirans (*tadib*) even if blood was spilt.[706] Several articles in the same newspaper mentioned that “there were some people [*al-anasir*] who threatened the unity and Arabness of Syria [*al-balad al-Suriyya wahda ‘arabiyya*].” However, the ruling elites insisted on the necessity of re-attracting and incorporating that Jaziran “majority.” Today, the Jaziran Christians’ post-memories are the incorporated ones, but not exactly in the way the Arab nationalists of the 1930s intended them to be, as the coming pages will demonstrate.

“Ancientness” and “autochthony” became two markers of “majority-ness” as such. Tens of articles can be found in the nationalist press drawing out the distinction between the majority (docile pro-Arab Jazirans) and refugee (dissident, foreigner Jazirans). This image of refugee as the “dissident foreigner” was transferred to the Jaziran Kurds in the post-1963 period.

The leaders of the movement were labelled as “refugees who deny favour” (*nakr al-jamil*). They were accused of lacking bona fides (*husn al-mukafa’*). They were described as “not being ashamed to steal our lands.”[707] The flag incident in Qamishli (in which the Syrian flag was torn down and urinated upon, while a Jaziran flag and a French flag were present in the welcoming ceremony for the HC) was the foremost incident that evoked excessiveness and the “lack of reciprocity” towards the refugees. It was viewed as treason.[708] All the attributes of the Regionalist leaders were conflated in an upbraiding rhetoric which employed the image of the relationship between a father and his urchin. Obviously, the figure of the

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[704] Osman Ramzi and Salim Hanna, *al-Jazira wa ricalatuha*, p. 5.
[705] *Alifba*, 03.04.1936.
[706] *Al-qabs*, 30.05.1938.
[707] *Al-qabs*, “wataniyya l fiqra wa masharia’ al-sahra”, 05.02.1938.
[708] *Al-qabs*, “ihanaten cadidaten”, 26.02.1939.

"urchin" referred to the whole Jaziran population waiting to be tamed by the "Syrian majority." The shepherd–sheep metaphor employed by the press in order to point out the possible dangers of the government's (the shepherd) neglect of the Jaziran question (the sheep) evoked the same patrimonial understanding which would characterize state–society relations in the post-colonial period as well.[709]

The French were accused of sacrificing the "majority" for the "interests of the minority," who they referred to as the "actors of the farce [*mahzala*]." The poor Jazirans (*masakin*), the nationalists argued, were forced to stand with the "5 percent minority," namely "a group of *refugees* from Syriacs and non-prominent personalities from the Kurdish tribes."

> It is not just or reasonable or traditional that the destiny of the country will be determined by people who are refugees and whose oldest relatives do not even have a cemetery on this land. [*laysa min al-haq wa la al-insaf wa la min 'orf aydan 'an tabau' masir al-balad fia min al-laciyn laysa li akbar ra's fiha qabr ab ou cad fadlan an ashira ou qabila.*][710]

The above words, by the renowned nationalist personality Najib al-Rayyes, indicate two things: that being a minority implies being newcomers and vice versa. Moreover, majority status implies a legitimate claim to rule and dominate, while minority status evokes the opposite—the illegitimacy of any claims to rule. The link between majority status and the claim to dominate was again the fruit of the post-treaty years during which Syrian independence turned out to be an achievable dream despite being challenged by the Regionalist movements, whose visibility was at a peak all over Syria.

Although the construction set out in the previous quotation seems to be solely a political move (in the sense that majority-ness was attributed to all those who "denounced the farce"), majority-ness was nevertheless still not devoid of ethnic and religious identifications, and here lies the ethnic and religious nature of belonging to the Syrian nation (the other markers of majority-ness were no different). The majority in Jazira, or, better, "the vast great majority" (*al-aksariyya al-sahika al-'azima*), was identified with the Arab tribes Shammar, Tayy, and Jabbour. Jazira was usually Arabized in the nationalist discourse, through defining it as "the land of Shammar, Jabbour, and Tayy."[711] The specification of "some" (*ba'd*) was added when referring to the Jaziran Kurds, in the sense of "some loyal Kurds"—meaning Daqquri,

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[709] *Al-qabs*, "al mintiqa al-haira", 19.10.1938
[710] *Al-qabs*, 03.08.1938.
[711] *Al-qabs*, "mahzala fi Jazira", 03.08.1938.

Milliyye, and Kikiyye (in their Arabized names)—which suggests that Kurdish membership of the nation was *conditional*; neither closed in an absolute sense nor as automatic as it is the case for the ethnic-Arabs. The fundamental rite of passage was that of proving their loyalty to the Arab nationalist cause. The Damascene Arab nationalists' observations in their very first visit to the "outskirts of Palmyra" (*badiyya Tadmur*)—that they could see the "nationalism of the desert" (*wataniyya al-sahra*) which was waiting to be Arabized by the Arab nationalist intellectuals—also gives signs about the constituents of proper Syrianness in the post-colonial phase.[712]

Another example revealing the relation between refugee-ness, minority-ness, and national belonging comes from Najib al-Rayyes immediately before the non-ratification of the treaty. In an article titled "Syria does not recognize a question called the Jaziran question," he states:

> Jazira is made up of Arabs and Kurds. They are the original inhabitants [*al-sukkan al-asliyyun*], they are the majority, they are the holders of land and they are the holders of interest [*ashab al-masalih*]. They do not ask for special privileges or think about any kind of separation [*infisal*] from Syria. The majority of the refugees [Armenians, Assyrians, Syriacs, and Kurds] take the same stand like the *unsur asliyya*. The refugees coming from Turkey and Iraq were granted vast amounts of land and several opportunities. Syria accepted this favour because they were poor, pitiful, and helpless. *But*, in case these refugees grow into a rebellious and unruly agglomeration [*jama'at mutaqattila maslaha 'atiyya 'asiyya*] and gain strength with the nourishment provided by Syria, attack its laws, assassinate its officers, with the pretext [*hijja*] that they hate Syrians, the French has to see the dangers of the situation.[713]

As al-Rayyes pointed out, the French actually envisioned the dangers of the situation for the future of French interests in the Levant. Meanwhile, the French view of Jazira had been greatly transformed, from a region "populated by traditionally loyal, open-minded, and hard-working Christians and Kurds" in the 1920s, to a "group of non-submissive Mardin-origin Christian artisans and boutique owners"[714] at the end of 1938. The description of Jazira in the *Rapport général de reconnaissance de Djézireh* drafted in 1941 implies the dominant French view on the Jaziran regionalist movement:

> this ethnic and confessional richness, an index of vitality, created a "socially undisciplined" milieu which was constituted of pockets of minority groups [*noyaux minoritaires*] fighting against all kinds of exterior assimilation, jealously conserving their languages and beliefs, having their

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[712] *Al-qabs*, "rahla al-furat wa al-Jazira", 05.02.1938.
[713] *Al-qabs*, 15.06.1939.
[714] Ibid., p. 2, and CHEAM, Louis Dillemann, Les Français en Haute-Djezireh (1919-1939), no. 50538, p. 33.

> proper schools, and hardly submitting to the necessities of organization and administration of modern state.[715]

In the meantime, some outspoken personalities from the Regionalist Group were giving early signs of their frustration with the French politics. The quotation below comes from Gello Shebo, a Midyat-origin Syriac Catholic who found refuge in Mosul, Iraq just before the 1915 genocide and migrated to Qamishli following the establishment of French rule in 1926, and who became one of the pioneers of the Regionalist movement. His menacing response to Colonel Lacroix, the newly appointed pro-treaty SR office, who asked the Regionalist group to "revise their demands," is significant in revealing the self-confidence of the Regionalist agency in adapting to the new conditions and shaping their own future.[716]

> We came here to find refuge in the shade of the "balls" [*couilles*] of France, not the "vulva" of Djemil Mardam Beg. They say that you are going to abandon us and leave. Leave, then. God is great. We have lived without you for centuries. Don't meddle in our business anymore in case Djémil Mardam blows us away. Until now we have been shot for 22 times, that would be the 23rd, thanks to you, the French. We don't have confidence in you anymore. Do you fear that I don't have any more confidence in you anymore?[717]

The next section concerns the ways in which those Jazirans who did not leave, but stayed in the Syrian Jazira through the post-colonial period, adapted, and continue to adapt, to the new conditions.

Re-membering the French Jazira in the Excess of Memories: Syriac Exceptionalism

This section is inspired by my curiosity about the extreme gap between the late 1930's Jaziran representations of Syria as inimical and detached (as well as the Arab nationalist representations of Jazira and the Jazirans as dissident preyers), and the present-day Jaziran-Christians' discourse of harmony and peace concerning both the history and present state of Christians and their relations with the Syrian state. In the recollections of my Christian

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[715] République Syrienne, Mohafazat de Djézireh, Rapport Général de Reconnaissance de Djézireh, p. 8.
[716] For Lacroix, see Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, Dossier 68, Les Fonctionnaires Français: Février-Avril 1938, Comment Certain Agents du Haut Commissariat se sont mis au Service de Damas pour Étouffer la Révolte de la Hte. Djézireh.
[717] Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, Dossier 59, Les Pressions Exercées sur la Population pour la Faire Céder, Compte rendu de la Réunion du 9 Mars 1938 de 18 à 21h, chez Michel Dome à Kamichlié.

interviewees, in particular the historical narratives of the Syriac establishment, the region and its inhabitants seem not to have witnessed that particular moment in recent history about which the French colonial archives store such voluminous files. Similarly, the Hassaka of sixty years ago—a time when the Arab newspapers referred to it as "the capital of provocation, disobedience, and conspiracy against the National rule and the Syrian treaty"—seems a distant past which has no relevance to the present lives of its inhabitants. The role of the French colonial presence in immigration to Jazira, and the following enrichment of the refugees, seems a negligible detail; the pro-French stance of the Regionalist movement, which was literally the one and only political movement in the region, seems like a fantasy. The discourse of "harmony, mutual corporation, and respect" between the Syrian state and Jaziran Christians; and the (social, economic, and social) antagonism between the former and the Jaziran Kurds seem to be eternal and complete. It is as if the very strong discourse of alienation and the demands for autonomy of the Jazirans in the 1930s, their depiction of Damascus as "weak, tyrannical, and partisan" have never happened.[718] The greed of the Arab nationalists towards the disproportional wealth of the Jaziran regionalist leaders and their eagerness to turn Jazira into a land like "any other part of the homeland" appears to be a completed process. Viewing the wealth of the "Jaziran refugees whose arrival in Syria does not exceed ten years" as a "selfish exploitation of the Arab goodwill" seems to have been overcome after the nationalization and Arab belt policies of the 1960s.

However, the memories of Jazirans indeed indicate that past is not past, or, in Ahıska's words, "unlike the modern history which buries the dead and deals with the past as past, the memories engage with spectres constantly and circularly re-establish the meaning of the present."[719] In this sense, as I have argued in the introduction, the rules of existence for both history and memory (of these controversial years) are identical, or are usually different vectors of the same discourse; and this is the very point where the present social and political discomforts and anxieties are articulated through a re-interpretation of hegemonic forms in a politically conformist manner, or in subversive modes as in the case of the memories of the Kurds.[720]

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[718] Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, dossier no. 19 ,"La Manifeste de la Djézireh, dans les premiers jours d'Avril 1938, La Comité de Défense de la Djézireh a publié le manifeste suivant",
[719] Meltem Ahıska, "Occidentalism and registers of truth: The politics of archives in Turkey", *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 34 (2006), p. 21.
[720] For discussions about counter hegemony, subversion, and resistance, see John Chalcraft and Yaseen Noorani (eds.), *Counterhegemony*.

The political and social processes in the politics of memory in Syria have already been discussed. I will now delve into—borrowing from Foucault—how socially organized knowledge of the past both reflects and affects the distribution and exercise of power.[721] More concretely, I will investigate the particular ways in which today's Jaziran Christians and Kurds have erased the memory of the Regionalist Movement and thereby redefine their subjectivities in the 2000s.

My basic contention, as related to the main argument of the thesis, is that the debates underlying the political contest of Syrian unity and independence by the Regionalist Movement in the 1930s are implied in the ways the Christians situate themselves vis-à-vis the Syrian society and state in 2000s. As I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the amnesia, especially of the Christians, regarding this period is marked by a pro-regime stance and shares the basics of the official Ba'th Arab nationalist view on the Regionalist movement. In this sense, today's memories definitely resonate with the civic version of the Arab nationalist response of the 1930s. They write the history of the region and the community into the history of full independence of Syria from the French colonial rule. Yet it is *more* than this. Similar to the hesitant Arab nationalism of the 1930s, vacillating between civic and ethnic Arab definitions of Jazira(ns), the Christians' memories—especially the Syriacs'—suffer from an equivocation between civic and ethnic understandings of *Syriacness*. I refer to this as the reappropriation of official Arab nationalist ideology through Syriac exceptionalism. Interestingly enough, this pro-regime Syriac exceptionalism of the 2000s is woven with the same markers of belonging, yet in a subverted form, as those which the Regionalists used to employ to define their "difference" from the "Arab Sunni majority" in the 1930s: *land*, *people*, and *history*.

Land, people, and history are the three significant markers of belonging employed by the political projects that have had a political claim on Jazira. Be it the Regionalist movement of the 1930s (including its pro-Kurdish and pro-Christian appropriations), the Dominican missionaries, the Arab nationalists of the same period, and (to a certain extent) the French colonial officers; or the post-colonial Syrian states, the Kurdish nationalists, and the Syriac/Assyrian nationalists of the present-day—they all embarked on imagining the land, history, and peoples of the region in different ways which are in contention with each other. Different groups' historical narratives of Qamishli stand out as a site through which several

[721] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

representations of the Syrian nation contest with each other in a struggle for domination in political, social, and economic spheres.

In this section, I trace the present-day Syriac imagination and the accompanying political claims on Jazira. I will approach the Syriac subjectivity both as a way to *unburden* themselves from the spectres of the post-treaty years (1936-39) and as an *interplay* between "powerlessness and empowerment" in 2000s' Syria.[722] The potential for communal empowerment/powerlessness stems from a specific class and historical situation, and from the various reactions of Jaziran Syriacs to the situation in which they live in the present. My argument regarding the "unburdening from the spectres of the 1930s" leans on the employment of identical foundational categories by the two arguably politically antithetical movements: the regionalism of the 1930s, and pro-state Syriac sectarianism of 2000s. The same three markers of belonging are interpreted in totally opposite ways, both in the pro-state and politically conformist discourse of *unity* and *harmony* which are intrinsic to the post-memories of the Syriac establishment today, and the anti-Syrian discourse of *difference* and *estrangement* that was endowed by the Regionalist Movement in the 1930s.

Although this similarity between two politically hostile tendencies seems contradictory, both of these positions may be approached as projects of appropriating and furthering the ruling central ideologies by the ruling elites in accordance with their political, social, and economic interests. The regionalists of the 1930s embraced and revived French colonial representations in a pro-Jaziran elite perspective, which in a certain context contradicted and even challenged the politics of the colonial master. Present-day Jaziran Syriacs embrace the Arab nationalist political stand on Jazira in the 1930s as taken over by Ba'th historiography, and re-construe it through a pro-Syriac perspective today. Their historical formulation is permissible in the eyes of the rulers as long as this project operates within the state-sponsored Syriac category and does not contest the politics of difference in Syria. In this sense, it helps in the revival of the official ideology. However, a Kurdish–Syriac rapprochement disturbs this order, and is thus violently crushed through a collaborative effort by the state and the elite groups of the community—this is because the Kurdish social and political claims on the Jaziran land contests the fragile official order of things on which the Syriac establishment relies.

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[722] For a similar argument about the Christian Palestinians in Israel, see Amalia Sa'ar, "Carefully on the Margins: Christian Palestinians in Haifa between nation and state," *American Ethnologist*, 25, 2 (1998), pp. 215-239.

In today's Syrian Jazira, the political and economic rivalry takes place primarily between the Jaziran Kurds and the Syriacs through their historical, social, and cultural claims on the same piece of land. The Armenians usually consider themselves—and are considered by the rest of the groups—as the "neutral" element, with less of a claim on Jaziran and Syrian land. The Armenians' acknowledgement as the "neutral element"—despite their being "most favoured" in the sectarian law in today's Syria, in contrast to their controversial history of immigration into Syria—suggests that the changes in the meaning of land is related to political processes and not to essentialist qualities. The fact that the Jaziran Arab population is not mentioned directly in my account below in no way indicates that they are another neutral element. Both the post-1973 Arab settlers (*ghamir*) and the autochton Arab population stand with the Ba'th politically and embrace the official Ba'th line concerning the eternal Arabness of the region, while some acknowledges the Kurdish pre-1945 Kurdish presence in the region.

What are the conditions of existence (to borrow from Foucault) of the Syriac sect-centred imaginations of the Jaziran land and its contest by the Kurds today? Similar to how the newly emerging sectarian self-representations of the community during the French mandate period appealed to the colonial authority, and its rules of formation maintained by the dominant colonial discourse, it is the Ba'th official ideology which sets the rules and limits of the sectarian imaginations in Syria today, as revealed in the Syriac establishment's attitude vis-à-vis the Kurdish question, and the community's imagination of itself vis-à-vis the Syrian nation.

As already mentioned in Chapter 1, Hafiz al-Asad's own words in his meeting with the members of the Syriac Orthodox group prove the state's approval for the limits of Syriac sectarianism in most perfect fashion. Moreover, Bashar al-Asad's civilizationist discourse, which celebrates Syria as a "melting-pot" of different religions, forms the legitimate background and informs the limits of the Syriac sectarian discourse. His speeches to the effect that "Arabism is not a race; but it signifies a strong belonging to Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and to all races that existed in the region," and that "Either Christianity or Islam has emerged from Syria," points to how far Syriac exceptionalism can expand. As far as the Kurdish claims are concerned, the Syrian state has been Arabizing the Jaziran land since the late 1930s, and in violent ways since the late 1960s. Presenting the Arab tribes of the region as the autochthones and the later demographic engineering—such as bringing in the Arab population from southern Syria and settling them in the frontier region—have accompanied the Syrian state's Arabization efforts.

In the coming subsection, I focus more on the intercommunal relations, especially on how the Syriacs appropriate the state-made category of sect in order to advance their sectarian power, and how this endeavour is reflected in the (post)memories of the colonial period in post-colonial Syria.

Reclaiming Jazira and the Jazirans from the "La Minorité": Land, People, History, and Economics

Land

Land has been an important component through which groups define themselves and their relations to others within the existing power relations in wider society. In Jazira, it has become a marker of the "autochthony" and internal homogeneity of the community and vice versa. In this imagination, land is no more a specially demarcated area, but is an historic territory and thereby a rightful possession.[723] This is the case for both the regionalists of the 1930s and the present-day Jazirans and Syrians.

In both the historical narratives of today's Syriacs (and Kurds) and the regionalists' pamphlets, land has become the *lieux de mémoire* through which the relation between the community, colonial agencies, the Syrian state/nation, and the Other (the Kurds) are fine-tuned. Different imaginations of the Jaziran land were employed in order to confirm their *difference* from or *harmony* with the Damascus-centred Syrian-Arab rule in the late 1930s and the post-colonial period, respectively. The historical and geographical contextualizations of the land as well as the agency of labour in its processing stand out as the most significant markers in the task of transforming space into a "homeland," a rightful possession. The ways in which each party situates the Jaziran land vis-à-vis the Syrian national territory is completely different, thanks to their adverse political agendas.

The pamphlets of the autonomists indicate Diyarbakir and Mardin, but definitely *not* Syria, as their place of origin, in order to prove that they are *not* Syrians. Along with this, Jazira is geographically contextualized in relation to Mesopotamia, *not* to Syria, which indicates that the incorporation of Jazira into a Damascus-centred unified Syria lacks historical relevance. "Un mot d'histoire" formed the introduction of almost all the pamphlets of the Regionalists. In the file addressing HC Gabriel Puaux, the Regionalists state that:

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[723] Colin Williams and Anthony Smith, "The National Construction of Social Space," *Progress in Human Geography*, 4 (1983), p. 509.

> The zone of Jazirah never in its history has become a part of Syria. In the antiquity, our dear Djézireh was a part of Mesopotamia. It belonged to Babylonia in passing by Assyria, but not to any other country. In contrast to their renaming today, all the monuments and other grand Assyrian vestiges prove this fact. All the conquerors, all the peoples have passed by here, except the Syrians. Indeed, what history shows us is that Syria, despite that it was stretched out, has never formed a state or a unity. In history, Syria has always been a walkway or a prey of other people coming from the north, south, or the east. Under the Turkish administration our region belonged to Diyarbakir and Mardin and these cities have never shared anything in common with Syria. It belonged to Turkey before the war, but never to the seigniors of Damascus. There is no geographical link between Djézireh and Damascus, which is separated from the latter by a desert without any communication for 700 km. Besides: there is no historical link between the two.[724]

Regarding their settlement as a *novel* political development following the final delimitation of the eastern end of the Turco-Syrian border is seen as another proof of the Jazirans' non-familiarity to Syria in the Regionalists' eyes.

> In May 1930, when Monsieur Ponsot proclaimed the Syrian constitution, 2/3 of Jazira was in Turkish hands. Syria was detached from the Ottoman Empire in 1918 and we were ceded to the French mandate by the Turkish Republic on 4 June 1930.[725]

The French mandatory rule in Syria was considered as the one and only reason that underpinned the population flow exclusively towards Jazira and not to anywhere else. Very much unlike the memories of Christians today, the narratives of "emigration" are furnished with a pro-French tone, namely appealing to the French rule *and* a historical estrangement from the Damascene one.

> We came here due to the invitation of Sir Captain Melchisédech. These vast deserts were transformed into the most fertile fields of Syria thanks to the French army aided by the indigenous elements with no contribution from Damascus at all.[726]

These claims were contested by the Arab nationalists in the 1930s by bringing in a range of representations of Jazira and notions of belonging to the Arab nation, from ethnic to

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[724] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Fonds Beyrouth, Inventaire 6, Box 143, 3e Dossier, Mouvement Autonomiste, "Pétition autonomiste des chefs et notables de la Jezireh", 5 Avril 1936.
[725] Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, Dossier 45, "Entretien de Monsieur Michel Dome, Président de la Municipalité de Kamechlié avec Monsieur le Comte Ostrorog et les Ministres Syriens à Damas," 4.8.1937, p. 1.
[726] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Fonds Beyrouth, Box 413, Dossiers 9095 and 4096.

territorial. The Arab nationalists propagated the idea that "Jazira has been a part of Syria since 4 June 1930 and is no different to any other part of the country." A nationalist booklet prepared for Francophone audiences stated:

> Even if it was the French who pacified or defended Jazira, they acted in the name of Syria on the basis of the right granted to them by the international agreements. The spatial organization of actual Syria whose frontiers raffle that capriciously, unexpectedly, and strangely will watch over all the secret negotiations which our territory bears the brunt of. Whatever it was, Jazira, where petrol is found, is Syrian. It is that part of Syria the newcomer Syrian citizens who were massacred by the Turks and abandoned by the English in Iraq have received extreme hospitality by the Arabs.[727]

They argued that the greatest Arab historians were indeed from the Jazira region and the most sumptuous Arab caliphates had summer houses in Raqqa, a Jaziran city. They added that "there is no region more Arab than Nissibin, Mardin, and Djéziret ben Amour, however those cities were given to the Turks."[728]

Dis-remembering the Regionalist Movement in the (post) memories of Syriacs almost always brings the land issue to the fore, about which they adopt the foundations of the 1930s Arab nationalist cause: a united independent Syria. However, both the oral accounts, which transmit more patchy and multivocal memories, and the published works by Syriac writers, which are more coherent and analytic, reveal the "Syriacness" of Qamishli and the region at large. Qamishli is viewed as embodying Syriacness. It becomes the homeland of the "Syriacs/Assyrians" in the pro-regime sectarian imagination of the Syriac establishment today.

Despite fact that the memories re-member a Syriac/Assyrian-Jazira, but not an Arab Jazira as in official Ba'th historiography, Syriacness is implicitly or at times explicitly defined in a favourable relationship to the official Arab nationalist ideology and its present practices. For instance, the "end to the collective massacres of Christians at the hands of the Muslims" is concurrent with the collapse of the "400-year-old Ottoman occupation of the Arab lands." That is to say, such a dual conclusive end to both the "Christian atrocities" and the "liberation of the Arabs from the Ottoman yoke" aims to create a national history for the community by incorporating it into the History of the Syrian-Arab nation.[729] The memories of the foundation and settlement in Qamishli form the concrete site where these re-presentations condense and

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[727] Syrie 1938, Les Faits, p. 27.
[728] Ibid.
[729] Jozef Asmar Malki, *min Nisibin ila Zalin*, p. 37.

through which the positive relation between the community and the Syrian nation is implied in its most explicit form. In this sense, the Jaziran Syriacs fuse the history of Jazira with that of Syria. It is not an act of assimilating Syriac history under an ethnic Arabness, but re-viving the official Arab nationalist version of Jaziran history through Syriac sectarianism. The community that emerges out of and is reinforced by the memories of place is a "unified, middle-class, politically conformist religious community."

Nearly all the books on Qamishli written by Syriac writers open with the ancientness of the region and its place in the history of the Aramaic empire/Assyria. Intrinsic to these pieces is a historico-political claim that the region has always been the land of Syriacs, and that it will stay so. Despite the fact that different understandings of Syriacness rival each other (pro-Assyrian or pro-Aramaic), these two politically conflicting views share the same view on the land. The pro-Aramaic one, which is embraced by the Syrian-Syriac establishment, appeals to Arab nationalist views on the Jaziran land.

Nusaybin and Tour 'Abdin play a central role in the Jaziran Syriacs' imagination of the homeland through conjoining them with Qamishli or Syrian Jazira (commonly referred to as *barriyya Mardin* by Syriacs) and they are treated as a unified homogonous space. Qamishli is viewed as the natural annex (*imtidad tabi'aiyya*) of Nusaybin. The latter is described as the "heartland of Christianity and culture" and so is Qamishli, or, in other words, neo-Nusaybin.

"We are the sons of Nusaybin and Nusaybin is the heartland of Christianity"[730] has almost become common-sense knowledge among the Syriac secular and religious establishment, as well as for the second generation Syriac/Assyrian nationalists, the grandsons of the survivors.

> Qamishli is an offspring of *Nisibin*. Indeed, it is neo-*Nisibin*. Nisibin used to be the social and religious centre of the *Suryan*. We had fifty-three schools there. Later, we settled down here thanks to the welcoming Arabs, and we constructed and raised this city, so we built up the new-Nisibin.[731]

Qamishli is praised as the "minaret of Syriac thought and culture thanks to the freedom provided by the Syrian regime."[732] The church and the Sunday school (*madrasa al-ahadiyya*), where the "holy Syriac language" is used, are stated as the two indicators of the generosity of

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[730] Taghrid Jafar al-Hashmi and Hasan Husayn 'Akla, a*l-Insan Tajalliyat al-Azmina: Tarikh wa Hadara… Bilad al-Rafidayn al-Jazira al-Suriyya* [Man, the Manifestations of Times: A History and A Civilization... Mesopotamia the Syrian Jazira] (Damascus: Dar al-Tali'a al-Jadida, 2001).
[731] Interview with the author, Hanna, May 2005, al-Qamishli, Syria.
[732] Dr. İlyas 'Afram, *Al-Qamishli wa Baqa min Adab Mahrajanat al-Suryan* [Qamishli and Bouquet of Assyriac Festival Literature] (Qamishli: 2002), p. 18; Ukin Boulis Munuffer Barsoum, *Al-Suryan fil al-qamishli*.

the Syrian regime. Similarly, the Aramaic language is praised on the basis of its contributions to world civilization, but above all to Arab civilization and science. The ancientness of the language appears as one of its most celebrated aspects. The fact that Arabic translations of Greek classics were made through Aramaic is presented as an example of Aramaic's contribution to Arab culture. The etymologies of some Arabic and Turkish place names—Qamishli, Gharzan, and Mardin; but, above all, Syria—are rooted in Aramaic.[733] The representations of Tour 'Abdin reveal the two ideological references to which establishment Syriac sectarianism appeals: pro-Aramean and Ba'thi Arab nationalism. Accordingly, Tour 'Abdin is viewed as benefitting from two cultures and two sources of goods at once: that of the mountain and the plains; the coal and the local sweets from Tour 'Abdin, and yoghurt and wool products from the Arab Tayy tribe.

Anthony Smith regards such a change in the meanings attached to the land as the nationalization of space, such that the land ceases to be a particular demarcated area, and becomes a historic territory and a rightful possession.[734] Williams and Smith argue that "whatever it may be, nationalism is always a struggle for control of land; whatever else the nation may be, it is nothing if not a mode of constructing and interpreting social space."[735] The necessity of a homeland, a national space of one's own, is a central tenet of nationalism. Coupling Nusaybin and Qamishli in religious and demographic terms and charging the land with a religio-nationalist meaning are both informed by a "Janus-faced" Syriac sectarianism, which is on the increase in the region.

People (Autochthony)

> We are the autochthones of this land. We are the sons of this land. We are the heirs of the Arameans. The Arameans are a nation [*sha'b*] acknowledged world-wide. They ruled over this land. Their religious and scientific influence extended to China. We have been living on this land and this is our homeland. However, our number has decreased considerably because most of the Syriacs converted into Islam. Look at the Arabs around. They are indeed Syriacs, but converted to Islam. Our numbers exceeded millions before the conquest of Islam.[736]

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[733] Ukin Boulis Munuffer Barsoum, *Al-Suryan fil al-qamishli*., p. 36.
[734] Colin Williams and Anthony Smith, "The National Construction of Social Space", *Progress in Human Geography*, 7, 4 (1983), p. 509.
[735] Ibid., pp. 502-518.
[736] Jozef Asmar Malki, *min Nisibin ila Zalin* p. 34.

These words belong to a middle-aged Syriac author who has written extensively on the Aramaic roots of the Arabic language, and the ancient history and culture of the region. It is not that the author, Malki, and others do not acknowledge that the Jaziran towns, for instance, are recent foundations (*nash'a*) by the French colonial power; but the Syriac sectarian ideology by which they are informed marks the Syriac presence in the region as eternal and ancient, in which the Syriacs, as a coherent unified whole, are privileged as the autochthons of the land.

Syriac exceptionalism and claims for autochthony have two dimensions: one is to counter the refugee label and its connotations that date back to the post-treaty years in the late 1930s; the second is to reflect and reinforce, in the present day, empowering and dominant positions vis-à-vis the Syrian state and the Other (Kurds), respectively.

As shown in the previous section, refugee-ness—which became identified with the Jazirans during the mandate period—came to conjure up images of dissidence and ingratitude. The angry Arab nationalist newspapers of the 1930s had particularly targeted some Syriacs as adherents of the pro-minority movement. The remembrances' claim to autochthony, thus, can be read as a manoeuvre to free the group from the social and political connotations of "refugee-ness" which was one of the makers of Jaziran-ness, and an un-maker of proper Syrianness, during the mandate period. And this is where the spectres of the past are revealed in the memories: the present-day memories attempt to develop a counter argument to the Regionalists' thesis, but unfortunately they fall short of developing a counter-hegemonic argument.

However, the Regionalists, too, attempted to neutralize the pejorative understanding of "refugee-ness" of the Arab nationalists in the mid 1930s. Although at times they asked for French protection through a politics of victimhood, they did not refrain from arguing that they were indeed *not* refugees, but "in their own county" (*propre pays*), as they viewed Jazira as part of the cities from which they originated, Mardin and Diyarbakır.

> We are at home here [*chez nous*], in our old province that the new frontier has divided into two. Facing home 30 km away from over the mountains, we can recognize our mosques, churches, cemeteries, houses, and properties … we are at home here more than the Damascenes feel at home. Here, instead of depopulating the imagined inhabitants of this desert, we are in the service

> of the French for resuscitating the prosperity of ancient Mesopotamia … . As we are not refugees, then we accept it with pride that we were the servants and the agents of the French.[737]

As the Arab nationalist understanding of refugees had already been challenged by *the refugees* themselves in 1937, where the latter's pro-French stance was confirmed, there are few alternatives left for present-day Syriacs in getting rid of the spectres of refugee-ness other than by adopting a stance in favour of the Syrian regime, and by not pretending to be the "domestiques" of the French but appealing to the Syrians and the Syrian regime, and complying with the Syrian politics of difference.

Mainstream Syriac sectarian ideology- that holds on to the pro-Aramean idea- keeps a complete silence on ethnic issues in Syria today. The Assyrianists speak out and criticize the Syrian state's Arabization policy vis-à-vis the non-Arabs including the Syriacs. The Kurds form the most outspoken group on the ethnic problem in Syria: indeed, they define themselves through this difference. Armenians, having a state guarantee of recognition as a non-Arab group, openly talk about their non-Arabness, but very rarely get into discussions about the ethnic issue in Syria—in other words, the Kurdish problem. In brief, the makeup of the population of the French Jazira—one of the most fundamental arguments through which the Regionalists had built their political case and proved their *difference* from the "majority" by defining themselves as the "minorité"—is a "non-issue" as far as the establishment Syriac community is concerned today. This view recalls the "non-movement" perspective of the Arab nationalists of the 1930s.

Against the criticisms by the French High Commissariat, that the Autonomy Movement in Jazira "gets its inspiration from the mentality of Mardin-origin Christian artisans and shop owners where the task of action is left to the Kurds in the overall division of labour,"[738] the Regionalists had underlined the territorial character and unanimity of the Autonomy Movement as manifested in their petitions addressing Paris and the League of Nations. "We differ from Damascus in terms of our culture race and traditions,"[739] or, similarly, "Jazira is inhabited by Kurds and other sects of Christians and Arabs who have nothing in common with Damascus and is horrified by the yoke of the latter."[740] In these petitions, the translation

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[737] Archives Dominicaines, Rapport adressé à la SDN par Michel Dome en date du 6 Aout 1937 ayant pour la titre "La vérité sur les événements sanglants du July 1937", p. 11.
[738] Ibid, p. 2 and CHEAM, Louis Dillemann, Les Français en Haute-Djézireh (1919-1939), no. 50538, p. 33.
[739] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Fonds Beyrouth Pétitions to SDN, Box 503, Dossier 1/9492.
[740] Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, Dossier 68, La question de la Djézireh, Titre VII, "Les Droits de Damas et de la France sur la Djézireh", p. 2.

of a discourse of cultural difference into politics became the right to self-administration and autonomy, as exposed in the words of the mayor of Qamishli, Michel Dome:

> Due to the fact that the Haute Djeziréh is between 2 frontiers and is composed of elements of diverse race and religion, we demand a neutral French governor to distribute justice among people and control the regional affairs. Since Jazira is a governorate and a part of dear Syria; the governor should be well aware of the local languages, the customs of the tribes and should be well aware of the local affairs; thus, he should be a neutral person. Besides, in accordance with the clauses of the Franco-Syrian treaty, French army garrisons should be designed. One of them should be designed particularly for monitoring the frontiers and for the prosperity of the country. The composition of the military officers and soldiers in these garrisons should be kept as it is at the moment. To re-establish and maintain the security in the countryside, mobile forces should be created.[741]

History

Alongside their claims for autochthony, today's Syriacs revert to historical narratives about the antique Assyrian/Aramaean existence in the region as a way to manage the excess of memories from the mandate period. Meltem Ahıska employs the concept "excess of memory" in order to explain those registers of truth which are not given a place and right to exist in history and fail to achieve public recognition, as the historical truth refuses to accommodate the traces of certain memories.[742] She claims that "the truth evoked in these narratives of memory fades, since their way of telling the truth is usually based on a practical closure; they are encapsulated in certain places or can only survive in the intimacy of private places."[743] I argue that, unlike the Turkish case where the memories suffer from claustrophobia, the excess of memories in the Syrian case is tamed through a state-approved sectarian discourse of community. And here lies the second dimension of the discourse of autochthony, affirming their enduring presence back to pre-Islamic times: empowerment and self assertion.

> The earliest settlements of the Syriac Christians in the Syrian Jazira go back to thousands of years before Christ. New materials from the times of Urnammu (2150 BC), or the earliest representations of the sun-goddess Shamsh (2500 BC) are discovered in the archaeological excavations that are being undertaken in several hills of the region. During the times of Jesus the Christ, the contributions of the Syriac Christians to civilization took the form of churches and

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[741] Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, Dossier 43, "La Manifeste de la Djézireh," p. 2.
[742] Ahıska, "Occidentalism", p. 22.
[743] Ibid., p. 24.

> academies, the most famous of which was the academy at Nisibin … . Against all the ruptures, occupations, and massacres throughout the history of the Jazira plain [outskirts of Nisibin], its people contributed to the development of civilization. Those people who survived out of these massacres and occupations found refugee in Tour 'Abdin, Bazibday, and Mardin … . Unfortunately, the demarcation of the border between Turkey and Syria in 1923 divided the age-old nations of the Jaziran plain, so our nation, including the Syriac, Chaldeans, and the eastern church of Assyrian, was divided.[744]

It is not a mere coincidence that written and oral narratives about the French mandate era refer back to the roots, foundational myths, and political history of the region before the Islamic occupation. Kashani Sabet points out the significance of Iran's loss of territory to its imperial rivals in the deepening of a sense of longing for Iran's imperial past, while inspiring a spate of geographical literature that inculcated the scientific data deemed necessary for policing the homeland.[745] Similarly, as revealed in the above quotation, the loss of socioeconomic and political hegemony in the new and distressing Syrian political context in the post–Gulf War period, and the relative decline in the number of Christians in Syrian Jazira since the 1970s in favour of the Kurds, gave way to claims and contests over the land. Be it in a secular/nationalist framework or a religion-based interpretation, the ancient history of Syria is linked to the Assyrian or the Aramaic Empires, respectively. Unlike the pro-Asyrian group which constructs an ethnic definition of Syriacness, the group which highlights the Aramaic origins of the Syriacs privileges religion over ethnicity and leaves out Chaldeans and Assyrians from the definition of Syriacness. In this way, they prepare the way for reconciliation between Arabness and Syriacness.

Syriac sectarian imaginations of the Syrian Jazira silence the historical Kurdish presence in the region. Just as the official ideology disbars the Jaziran Kurds from Syrian citizenship based on the claim that they are indeed "refugees," the Syriacs' memories on Qamishli erase the Kurdish presence from the land.[746] The state-sponsored dominant Syriac view- the pro-Aramaic version- upheld by the church and the Syriac *majlis-al milli* is justifiably contested by the Kurds, who are excluded not only from the imagined Assyrian or Aramaic Empires,

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[744] 'Aziz Ahi, *Nidal Umma: Dirasa fi Tarikh Nidal Abna' al-Umma al-Suryaniyya al-Ashuriyya al-Kildaniyya* [The Struggle of a Nation: A Study into the History of the Struggle of the Sons of the Syriac Assyrian Chaldean Nation] (n,p: n.d.), p. 6.

[745] Firuzeh Kashani-Sabet, "Picturing the Homeland: Geography and National Identity in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Iran," *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 24, no. 4 (1998), p. 423.

[746] For similar state attempts in the Turkish and Palestinian context, see the studies by Kerem Öktem and Ted Swedenburg: Kerem Öktem, "The Nation's Imprint: Demographic Engineering and the Change of Toponymes in Republican Turkey," *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, Thematic Issue, 7 (2009), http://www.ejts.org/document2243 .html; Ted Swedenburgh, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Fayeteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003).

but from their immediate state, Syria. However, as mentioned previously, the Kurds in Jazira do not solely define themselves through their struggle with the other sects, but more importantly through their political struggle with the Syrian state and the Arab nationalist official ideology. For the Jaziran Kurds, underlying Kurdish identity are the concrete and immediate consequences of the present-day Ba'th Arabization project, such as the state-settled Arab villages next to the Kurdish ones (*ghamir*), their disenfranchised Kurdish fellowmen, and the various modes of impoverishment in other spheres of life that are generated by the power relations between the Kurds, the state, and the "privileged sects." It is through imposing coherence and continuity between the two state oppressions—of Turkey, and of the Syrian Arab republic—that the Jaziran Kurdish sense of being is formed. In this sense, unlike the other Christian sects in the region, the past/history is not the one and only domain where the Kurds appear as a community. On the contrary, the past is usually judged on the basis of absence, as illustrated in the previous chapter.

This is why the Kurds' memories of the late 1930s speak both to the Syrian state and the Jaziran Arabs, as well as to the Syriacs' claims of autochthony which promote a permissible version of the official anti-Kurdish narrative. Neither a discursive canon nor a mass political movement to counter the anti-Kurdish arguments and repressive state practices has as yet been fully developed in Syria. Nevertheless, the counter-memories—which seek to counter the official narrative by proving Kurdish autochthony in the region—form the plot of the Kurdish memories regarding the whole of the French mandate period. The resistance to the Syriac community's claims for autochthony takes the form of a common sense knowledge which perpetuates the construction of a Syrian-Kurdishness, if not a transnational Kurdish identity. If over-remembering and mentioning the newly settled Arab villages (*ghamir*s) at the expense of the Kurdish villages is a counter-memory resisting the forgetting of the injustice, the idea that the whole region used to belong to Mardin, so that the Amouda and Qamishli districts were considered as "*deşta Mêrdîn*" (the plain of Mardin, similar to Syriacs' usage of the expression of *barriyya Mardin*), may be considered the widely shared Kurdish common sense imagination of Jazira. The Kurdish tribes that have ruled in the region for centuries are also taken as another proof of autochthony:

> The Qamishli region belongs to the region of Nusaybin, and the fundamental element/autochthon [*al-sukkan al-'asliyyun*] is the Kurds. This region is a genuine and authentic Kurdish region. There have always been a continual Kurdish population here [*tawasul Kurdi*]. The Arabs wanted to arabize [*ta'rib*] the region. Despite the fact that the power of the tribe decreased after the

imposition of the borders, yet in reality it is the Ba'th period [*ittihad al-suri*] and the incursion [*istila al-aradhi*] that disturbed everything.[747]

Although they are few in number, some works published by Kurdish writers (in Kurdish or in Arabic) counter the Syriacs' politically conformist or otherwise sectarian narratives of Qamishli. Although the oral narratives may adopt a nationalist tone, the publications are more cautious. Anxious about being labelled "separatists," they introduce the multi-ethnic and multi-religious human geography of Jazira in which the Kurds re-claim its historical and present place in demographic, economic, social, cultural, and administrative terms. Konê Reş's ethnographic work on Qamishli is an example of this, and İbrahim Mahmoud's more literary text on the city is another.[748] Without falling into the nominalism of the official ideology and its sectarian versions, they portray a multi-ethnic and multi-religious city, and wish for coexistence without directly mentioning the Kurdish question—the source of the gravest inequality in the region.[749] Even a historical narrative of this nature was enough for the book to be outlawed by the Syrian state authorities.

In the introduction to his eloquently written book on Qamishli, Ibrahim Mahmoud states that his aim is not to discuss or prove who first arrived in Qamishli.[750] That Mahmoud forewarns his readers that he will avoid tackling the "first comer" question reveals that this very question is one of the most contested issues, with significant social and political implications, within the power struggles in the Jaziran and Syrian public sphere. And this is indeed the case.

The Jaziran Syriac establishment ideology claims that the History begins with their arrival in the region. Most conversations with Syriacs about the local history of the city open with the remark that "there was nothing before [their arrival], and they made it all"; and this is followed by the commencement of the History with *their* arrival. The Arab presence in the region—and implicitly the Kurdish absence—always accompanies the Syriacs' possessive

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[747] Abbas Ismail, interview with the author, Qamishli, 2006.
[748] In the absence of a state, or established state-like institutions, the internet becomes a very important medium for the circulation of counter-memories. There are several other more balanced accounts of Qamishli or Nisibin published by the newly elected Kurdish municipalities of Mardin and Diyarbakır. A few examples are http://www.anotherlookateast.org/content.asp?c_id=124; and Eslîxan Yıldırım Tanhan, *Kaniyek ji Mezopotamyayê Nısêbîn* (İstanbul: Enstîtuya Kurdî ya Stenbolê, 2005).
[749] Konê Reş, *Madinat al-Qamishli: Dirasa fi Jughrafiyyat al-Mudun* [The City of Qamishli: A Study in the Geography of Cities] (Istanbul: Amude, 2003), p. 43.
[750] Ibrahim Mahmoud, *'Iqa'at Madina: Fusul min Sirat Madinat al-Qamishli* [Rhythms of a City: Chapters from the Biography of Qamishli] (Damascus: Dar al-Yinabi'a, 2000).

sectarianism. In this sense, "arriving in first in Qamishli" is arguably yet another marker of the "right to reside" and a sign of autochthony.

> The Suryan (i.e., Syriacs) were the first comers to Qamishli, followed by the other various communities [*al-tawa'if al-shaqiqa*]. There was the generous Arab Tayy tribe when we first arrived here and added onto them are the Christians.[751]

Particularly in the oral memories of the Jaziran Kurds, the Kurdish landholders and notables of Nusaybin are employed as proofs of Kurdish autochthony and localness in Qamishli.

> Kurdish landholders arrived in the city in order to re-claim their properties that were left in the Syrian part after the delimitation of the border. The water mill and the neighbourhood of Qaddur Beg, the first kaimakam of Qamishli, Hasan Çelebi, Beyt 'Alo [Hasan Taho], Nizameddin Beg, 'Ali Necim are all Kurds and were the urban notables before the Nasr period.[752]

While the Syriac community contends that they are the "first comers" to this "land which was already theirs," and the Kurds arguably claim that they have always been present in Jazira, if not being one of the first comers; the French accounts state that it was the Jews from Nisibin (the population increasing from 650 Jews in 1927 right after the foundation of the city, to 2,000 Jews in 1934) who constituted the city's first settlers.[753] The French sources argue that following the foundation of Qamishli, the Jews—mostly merchants from Nusaybin—arrived overnight in 1927. They were followed in 1928 by 100 Jewish families, then 50 Christian Catholic families from Iraq arrived, followed by some Armenians from Aleppo.

The ways in which the Jaziran Kurds counter Syriac exceptionalism is usually through challenging the monolithic dominant state/sectarian discourses. Kona Reş, for instance, acknowledges that the Jews were the first-comers to Qamishli, then mentions the non-sectarian nature of the notables, peoples, civil, and monumental buildings in the city, while

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[751] Jozef Asmar, *Min Nusaybin ila Zalin*, p. 63.
[752] Abbas Ismail, interview with the author, Qamishli, 2006.
[753] MAE, Levant, 1918-1940, Syrie-Liban, vol. 302, "Situation des refugies de haute Djézireh, octobre 1927," rapport fait par Poidebard, 6 janvier 1928, Beyrouth. In 1934, 86 Jewish families left for Palestine. Taken from Tachjian, *La France en Cilicie et en Haut-Mésopotamie*, p. 22, CADN, Syrie-Liban, 1er versement, no. 1775, Note de Renseignement de la Sûreté générale, Kamichlié, 25 Juin 1934, no. 2280, Beyrouth. Currently, there is only one Jewish family left in Qamishli and living as a Christian convert.

(for understandable political reasons) avoiding discussion of the repressive mechanisms underlying the Kurdish invisibility in the urban space. His liberal intervention is a sign of self-expression. Ibrahim Mahmoud highlights the multiethnic, multi-religious, and multilingual history of Qamishli. His book on Qamishli opens with different names of the city in different languages and dialects of the region—Kurdish, Assyrian, Mardin dialect, official Arabic, Bedouin dialect, and so on. His descriptions of the peoples and spaces in Qamishli acknowledge the complexity of the peoples' identities and the present-ness of their histories, which are articulated through different mediums. In this sense, he not only challenges the Arab nationalist and Syriac exceptionalist versions of the area's history: above all, he contests the rule of difference in Syria through offering a non-nationalist and and subaltern historical imagination.

> The building of Qaddour beg, in the Qaddour Beg neighbourhood, building of Mirxan in the centre of the city, Sheikh Mizar's house, Farraj Na'um's residence, beautiful houses belonging to the Asfar u Najjar, Terzibashi and Ma'marbashi families … . There are houses that still keep a painful memory and carry among them roads that bleed blood and fear and hunger and dead people: young and old, women and men. These are the roads of Armenian people's massacres which penetrated Qamishli from more than one direction. There are also other houses that belong to Syriacs, who in turn still carry in the depth of their memories, pictures, and scenes of their own massacres and *fermans*. And there are Kurds who were deported and followed, so they scattered around the earth.[754]

Economic Agency

The emphasis on the labour spent in making the economic and social prosperity of the region is represented as the yardstick of sentimental attachment to the land, love of the land and its people. Anthony Smith argues that the power dimension of the nationalist homeland is clearly revealed in its nation-building programmes. The homeland here is both an arena for practical construction and a reservoir of manpower. Work on the land—reclamation, irrigation, planting, dam building, and so on—is regarded as essential nation-building work, "since it is the land which must be renewed and rebuilt in the first place. Practical work on the land, therefore, serves the double purpose of providing the homeland with an infrastructure

[754] Ibrahim Mahmoud, *'Iqa'at al-madina*, p. 18.

and of imbuing its man power with the necessary zeal to make the sacrifices of modernisation."[755]

The fundamental marker of the Syriacness of Qamishli and Jazira appears in the debates over agency in the building of the city. The agency issue regarding the foundation, settlement, and social history of the 80-year-old city of Qamishli turns out to be the most common marker of belonging to the sect (*al-ta'ifa*), as well as indirectly promoting the Ba'th politics of difference. Agency forms the domain in which there is a symmetrical contrast between the Regionalists' narratives of the French Jazira and the Syriacs' (post)memories of the making of the city. While the former singles out the fundamental role played by the French officers together with the Jazirans in the economic and social flourishing of the region, the latter silences the French agency and ascribes the active agency to the sect—though very rarely to Jazirans as a multi-ethnic and religious Jaziran collectivity.

The report drafted by Michel Dome entitled "La vérité sur les événements sanglants du Juillet 1937" is exemplary of how the Regionalists privileged the French agency in the making of Jazira, especially in such formal letters addressing the League of Nations:

> Before the war, the region was a deserted waste land. It was entirely devastated. There were no more than 2 villages which were also ruined and in a miserable condition. Tens of millions of nomads had made no single effort to make their land a habitable place. Attracted by the prestige of the three-coloured flag, the emigrants of all kinds … arrived in Jazira. Thanks to the French military, which first pacified the region and then greatly contributed to its renovation, we witnessed the development of 2 cities: Hassatche and Kamichlié. In addition, the flourishing of 500 prosperous villages should also be considered as their work.[756]

Not surprisingly, the colonial reports had also highlighted the pioneering role of the SR officers in Haute Djézireh, thereby legitimizing the colonial rule. In one such report, prepared for the "urgent need for the direct and permanent efforts of SR officers for the organization of the Sanjak of Bec du Canard," the Lieutenant Colonel director of the Intelligence Service of Levant referred to the undeniable efforts of "les Terrier, les Bret, les Mamier, les Guenin, les Dillemann" in the becoming of what "Qamishli has become at the time."[757] A brief glance at the reports penned in the early 1930s reveals the same line of thinking, that the SR officers

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[755] Anthony Smith, "States and Homelands: The Social and Geopolitical Implications of National Territory," *Millennium*, 10, 1 (1981), p. 194.
[756] Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, Dossier 58, Rapport adressé à la SDN par Michel Dome en date du 6 Aout 1937 ayant pour la titre "La vérité sur les événements sanglants du Juillet 1937", p. 1.
[757] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Box 550, SC Bureau Politique, no. 5072, Le secrétaire général Hoppenot, la délègue de HC, Damas, Organisation de Sandjak de Haute Djézireh, 17 July1930.

were the main actors in transforming Jazira "from an insecure desert to a peaceful and flourishing place"; that it was the "paix Française" which underlay the social and economic flourishing of the region. In more realistic treatments of Qamishli, especially those reports not addressed directly to Paris but to other local authorities, the agency of the local Jazirans is mentioned; nevertheless, sectarian language was not employed. Dillemann writes openly that

> The Haute Djeziréh is the place of refugee people who escaped from the intransigent policies of the Turkish state. Above all it is the merchants who have a big hand in the prosperity of the region.[758]

In the Regionalists' and the French colonial discourses, the contrast between the economic production and demography figures of the pre-mandate and post-mandate periods form the main temporal axis through which the colonial discourse of revival of Djézireh is constructed. Many reports aiming to prove (to the French authorities in Paris) the economic benefits of the continuation of mandatory rule in Jazira open with such a comparative perspective praising the French agency in its efforts at *mise en valeur*. The many-paged dossier presented by the head of the Dominican church Father R.P. Savey to Quoi d'Orsay at the request of Syriac Catholic Cardinal Tappouni opens with the description of Qamishli evolving from "nothing" to a city with "20 thousand inhabitants" in 1938.[759] Flourishing Jazira, with its population increasing from 10,000 in 1922 to 150,000 in 1937, wheat production rising from 1,000 tons in 1927 to 150,000 tons in 1938, together with its petrol possibilities, are presented as the proofs of the mutual benefits of the mandate regime. The continuation of the elite-dominated sectarian system in the French Jazira is demanded on this basis, as Michel Dome states:

> Such a granary against this dearth that these vast deserts were transformed into the most fertile fields of Syria: in 1927, the Jazira gave 1,000 tonnes of wheat and in 1938 she gave 50,000, which means 500 percent more. We built 1,500 villages thanks to France who sustained the order and security here. But the Franco-Syrian treaty avoids granting protection for the non-Muslim minorities here in the midst of the desert who are 850 km away from Beirut and who are left to

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[758] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Box 550, Louis Dillemann "Etude de développement économique du basin Superior de Djagh Djagh depuis l'occupation Française (1926-1931)", October 1931.
[759] Archives Dominicaines Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, Dossier 43, La Question de la Djézireh, Titre I- la Djézireh, Un peu d'histoire.

the mercy of pillars and assassinations in the hands of the Bedouins who are agitated by certain groups in Damascus.[760]

As noted several times in the preceding pages, the regionalist elites did not passively repeat the French colonial discourse but actively engaged in re-interpreting it in line with their own interests, which at times generated controversial encounters between the two. The official publication of the Regionalist bloc, "Comite Général de Défense de la Haute Djézireh," relies on the agency of the Jazirans for empowerment vis-à-vis the French and the central Syrian government.

> We, the "refugees" provided the agricultural labour and made sacrifices in order to transform this desert country, from a refuge of the raiders, a desert of Bedouins, plunder of the brigades, to a flourishing centre of agriculture and trade inhabited by people. The French established these refugees in this country under her protection and ever since we can work in peace and security … this collaboration between the French and the Refugees was successful. It was a sincere collaboration with the French which is never to the detriment of the country. It has been the population who has profited. Not a single French officer has ever enriched himself in Jazira … the French officers have made a long tour in the *bled* [country], visited the tribes for the peace to reign and regulated the various differences, jealousies, and quarrels in the region. They built the tracks and the bridges. They controlled and managed the work of the officers. They regulated the frontier incidents and made the city plans. Yes, they are the real colonizers and civilizers, the new founders of Jazira. It is an honour that comrade Khalid Bakdash rejects … . Hassatche has reached 10 thousand inhabitants with 300 villages, Kamichlié counts 20 thousand inhabitants with 400 villages, Derbessié 8,000 inhabitants and 200 villages, Ras el Aïn 5,000 inhabitants and Amouda 7,000 inhabitants. The Kurdish population lives mostly in the villages and more than 20,000 people form the Arab nomadic tribes ... Tell Kotchak, the last stop of the railway line, has become an important point for transit trade. In 1936-37, at certain days 100 trucks of wheat had arrived from Mosul to be transported to the inner Syrian towns. Thanks to the security provided by the French army, petrol was discovered by the I.P.C Company. The soil has an incomparable fertility. The exported wheat in 1936 only by the railway exceeded 55,000 tones against 1,000 in 1927. The Syrian soil is very favourable for the cultivation of barge, rice, and corn. Cotton is the same. When Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo were demonstrating against the mandatory power in 1936, Djézireh rested in calm and worked. The testimony of HC and General Jacquot shows that without the Jaziran crops, Syria would suffer from famine in the 1936-1937 winter.[761]

However, as illustrated in detail in the previous chapter, the French colonial agency is rarely mentioned, but is rather avoided or reduced to a "minor cultural effect" in the (post)memories particularly of the Jaziran Syriacs. The constructive agency is ascribed to the

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[760] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Fonds Beyrouth, Box 503, Dossier 1, no. 9492, and Archives Dominicaines Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, Dossier 43 "Entretien de Monsieur Michel Dome, président de la municipalité de Kamechlié avec Monsieur le Comte Ostrorog et les Ministres Syriens à Damas," 4.8.1937, p. 3.
[761] Comite général de défense de la Haute Djézireh, *La Question Syrienne La Vérité sur les événements de la Djézireh, Aperçu Historique par un témoin Oculaire* (Imprimerie Catholique: Beyrouth, 1937), pp. 10-14.

"hardworking and able" community who "self-realized and flourished in the safety and peace found upon arrival in Syria." At the expense of repetition: regarding the founding and development of the city, the dominant discourse among the Syriacs is the discourse of re-incarnation in Syria articulated through the tropes of "ashes" or "being the architect of one's own destiny," and as exemplified in the "there was nothing, we made it" topos. Its implicit yet passive "anti-colonial" aspect displays similarities with the official Ba'th discourse on the mandate period. The anti-colonial discourse and full embracement of the agency in the reinvigoration of Jazira varies depending on one's current socioeconomic and political stance in the present and in the past, prior to arrival in the French Jazira. The purest form of "silencing" and self/communal-esteem can be found in the narratives of the Syriac establishment and the ex-notables of that community.

Nevertheless, the (post)memories are not neat replicas of the official Ba'th discourse either. The more commonly encountered narrative about the local history of the city recognizes the French agency in the social and economic making of Jazira.

> The French founded the city and the Syriacs built it up ['*amar*]. After they left, everything came to a point of chaos. The French brought here "safety" [*aman*]. Our families were sentimentally attached to Syria. But the French divided the families on the basis of Catholic and Orthodox. So, the French, as well, ruined our lives [*kharrabu baytna*].[762]

As mentioned in the previous chapter, emphasis on the centrality of the Syriac community in the making of the city might seem to contradict the unitary corporatist Ba'th discourse which aims to curb "sectarian tendencies" and assimilate the difference into the Syrian nation. For this, one has to look into the particular ways in which the self-agency is constructed vis-á-vis the dominant forces in the society. It is the "Arabs" and the "Syrian government" who are appealed to in assuring and sustaining the necessary "freedom and peace" for the Syriac agency to be realized. As well as this, the fact that the Jaziran Syriacs are approaching the establishment and describe themselves as a religio-linguistic community is in accordance with the offcial state ideology. Since the 1990s, this official ideology has slightly shifted towards a more so-called "culturalist and civilizationist discourse," a process of transformation which has been accelerating in the post–Hafez al-Assad years.

However, the Arab nationalists in the 1930s had argued that it was *not* the new habitants of Jazira who had built the region, as the Regionalists claimed, but rather the Syrian Arabs,

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[762] Hanna Riyadha, interview with the author, Qamishli, 2006.

who had been there for four thousand years and made immense efforts for the welfare of the region. Similarly, the Damascene Arab nationalist newspapers *al-qabs*, *al-Cha'b*, and *alifba* were full of articles about the archaeology of Jazira aiming to prove that the Arabs of Jazira (the Bedouins) had indeed contributed much to the wealth and culture of the region. Against the colonial accounts, which argued along the lines that "it is the new habitants of Jazira who have built it up,"[763] the Arab nationalist line in the 1930s, which was later inherited in the post-colonial period, argued as follows:

> Due to some unfortunate events that occurred after WWI, the region witnessed the exodus of immigrants from Turkey … . The Christians from the heights of Mardin, Kurds from the Tour Mountain, and Assyro-Chaldeans from Iraq … . It is argued that the new inhabitants of Jazira built it up … . This is a very childish statement [*observation puérile*] … the Khabur of the Euphrates and the Tigris were the wealthiest regions of the Orient since the time of the Umayyad and the Abbasids for thousands of years … . There is no other term as vague as the term minority. Up until now, it is not well explained what is exactly meant by that term. … See the Arab Christians who are faithful to the national cause as much as the Muslims; or see the Kurds and the Armenians whose loyalty to Syria is confirmed during the Alexandretta events.[764]

How, then, could today's Syriacs bypass the pro-Arab bias in the Arab nationalist narrative and secure a place in the Syrian nation?

In as much as remembering their age-old presence in the region and linking it to the nation contributes to the imagining of a politically conformist Syriac community, relating the economic prosperity of the region directly to the well-being of Syria as a whole serves the same end. Through positioning the *land* and the *Christians* as an organic part of Syria, today's Syriacs celebrate their labour effort (and thus their communal agency) on the basis of its contribution to the Syrian economy. Their communal agency is highlighted in the overall welfare of Syria. Hence, the fate of every Jaziran Christian is tied to the nation and vice versa. In this manner, the community opens up the way for political, economic, and social recognition in the larger Syrian-Arab public sphere. What appears in the end is a particular amalgamation rising out of a strategic and creative use of Arab national and Syriac communal discursive resources which indeed form the cornerstone of the middle-class Syriac-Christian identity in Syria.

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[763] M. M. Jérôme and Jean Tharaud, *Alerte en Syrie* (Paris: Plon, 1937), p. 15.
[764] For the official Arab view on Jazira, see Office National Arabe de Recherches et d'Informations, *Syrie 1938* (Damas, 1938), p. 27.

Would the Arab nationalists of the 1930s ever have imagined that their age-old adversaries, namely the newcomer Syriacs, would consider themselves as full-fledged Syrians only sixty years later and employ the same sectarian language of power to articulate their discontent? Would they ever have thought that the pro-French refugees of the 1930s would employ a similar nationalist discourse of autochthony, but this time with a communal flavour, in order to exclude the Kurds from membership in the nation's club? Would it ever have been possible to read an excerpt by a Jaziran Syriac writer similar to the one below, written in the 1930s?

> *Suryan* is an inevitable component for the good of Syria as a whole. They are the founders of the Arabic language. They are the generator of culture and literature in Syria. Even the word Syria is a Syriac origin word. There are thousands of words like that. *Suryan* are the initiators in the formation of a national market. The industrialist family, *Asfur wa Naccar*, used to produce rice for the consumption of the whole of Syria. Jazira was the warehouse of wheat, barley, and cotton. *Asfur wa Naccar* families are originally from *Diyarbekir* and arrived in Qamishli in 1935. They were big landowners. They are the ones who used tractors and irrigation pumps for the first time in Syria.[765]

When the above quotation is compared to the excerpt below from the regionalists' petition, it is once again confirmed that political conformism and complying with the state-sponsored politics of difference are some of the ways to drive away the spectres and ensure a secure place in the nation. In a pamphlet from 1938 entitled "Colonie Damascaine," the Damascus-centred rule in Syria was argued to be *exploiting* the economic infrastructure of Jazira in favour of the former. If the Jazira were not an *internal colony* of Damascus, which they contended was the case after 1936, then the region would be relatively self-sufficient in economic terms and could support itself much more efficiently than any other region in Syria.

> Jazira is richer in minerals than Jabal Druze and it has a huge agricultural potential if the right investments are made and the right steps are taken. More than that, excluding the tariffs collected in the trans-border trade and the amounts that are sent to Damascus, we are still rich. But most of the revenue of the region is squandered by Damascus for the salaries of their functionaries who are real parasites for us. The free Jazira will cure this shortcoming by employing its own functionaries who are recruited from its fellow boys and have the same capabilities as the greedy Damascenes.[766]

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[765] al-Shakra, interview with the author, May 2005, Qamishli, Syria.
[766] CADN, Cabinet Politique, Fonds Beyrouth, Box 413, la mazbata regionalistes à Monsieur Flandin, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris, 5April 1936.

> Your Excellency Monsieur Comte Ostrorog [a senior French officer], you saved Lebanon, Tripoli, the Alawites, the Druze and the Alexandretta. Rescue Jazira as well [*sauvez aussi la Djézireh*].[767]

How, then, should the introduction of the idea of community/sect in the (post)memories be explained? Is it a critical point where the Syrian nationalist discourse *fractures*, or is it a space where the national narrative *stretches* in order to *absorb* the community/sect into its ranks? Or, to put in the terminology of memory studies: Is the history overridden by memory, thus rendering history and memory oppositional? Or should memory and history be posited as entangled, where history is subsumed into memory and two narratives indeed reinforce each other? I favour the second argument; but it should be nuanced by a power perspective.

Every national discourse bears a certain degree of flexibility, as every hegemonic ideology has to appeal to society in order to acquire consent. The degree of stretch is contextual and continuously negotiated between the ruling classes and the societal actors. The Syrian nationalist discourse in the late 1990s allows the introduction of "the community," as long as it is defined in a positive relation to the primary credentials of the Syrian Arab nationalist ideology.[768] It is a legitimate stretch as long as it does not note the violence of the state, the local authorities, or the ruling classes in the stories. As well as this, the very constituents of the stretch should be stripped of any orientation towards an alternative future. The excess in the stories can bring themselves into the light of the generality as much as the ruling ideology permits. Hence, the excess of the stories of the mandate years in the Syriac memory are translated into a conformist sectarian anti-Kurdish discourse. If not "acceptable," then the latter would be harsh enough to repress and destroy the traces of politically illicit discourses. It should be remembered that the state authorities have a violent attitude towards certain Assyrian nationalist organizations which define Syriacness on an ethnic basis as opposed to the state's definition of the Syriac community as Christian-Arabs.[769] The Syriac Orthodox establishment has been no less active in ostracizing those nationalist organizations

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[767] Archives Dominicaines, Fonds Haute Djeziréh, Série IV, Dossier 45, "Entretien de Monsieur Michel Dome, président de la municipalité de Kamechlié avec Monsieur le Comte Ostrorog et les Ministres Syriens à Damas," 4.8.1937, p. 1.

[768] Bashar al-Asad's civilizationist discourse, which celebrates Syria as a melting pot of different religions, forms the legitimate background and informs the limits of the Syriac's sectarian discourse.

[769] For the views of Assyrian nationalists in this context, see 'Aziz Ahi, *Ma'sat Sh'ab: Dirasa Tahliliyya Mujaza 'an Waqi' al-Sha'ab al-Ashuri al-Suryani al-Kildani khilal al-Qarn al-'Ishrin* [The Tragedy of a Nation: A Brief Analytical Study on the Reality of the Assyrian Syriac Chaldean Nation] (n.p.: n.d.); and the Assyrian Democratic Organization at www.ado-world.org.

that challenge the religious-based definition of Syriacness that conforms to the status quo. Not surprisingly, the state and the church collaborate in their efforts against those Assyrian nationalist organizations that have close contact with Kurdish political parties in Syria or in Iraq.

The words of a middle aged Syriac woman, the only member now living in Qamishli of a once-prominent family, reinforces the above point—that as long as the memory works within the confines of the hegemonic historical narrative, the discourse of flight does not obscure the claims of autochthony and legitimate existence of the Syriac community in the region today. Thus, their late arrival does not form a pretext for self-rule under an imperial tutelage. A French colonial governor is not contemplated as a guardian against the threats of the "outsiders" because the Christians of Jazira today consider themselves as "insiders and locals" thanks to the redefinition of *autochthony* to serve their novel political ends.

> Fine, we are also immigrants here like the Armenians. But, *we* built up this land. This is *our* land. We accept the fact that our families are refugees from Turkey, all of us have properties there in Turkey, but we are from *here* … *we* built up this city and the market; we built our own schools, churches, charities, and so on … . Not the French or anyone else but *we* … my grandfather who was the first mayor of the city in the post independence period and the community [*al-ta'ifa*] made them all. We are Syrians. We consider ourselves Syrian.[770]

[770] al-Nikhba, interview with the author, May 2005, Qamishli, Syria.

Conclusion: Power, Politics, Violence

When I set out on research for this thesis, I planned it as an account of the making of the Turkish–Syrian border from the perspective of those who were displaced from one side, in Turkey, to the other in Syria. It intended to focus on the contested meanings of the border through studying the unequal encounters between the French colonial state, the newly founded Turkish state, the Syrian Arab nationalists aspiring for political power, and the refugees arriving in Jazira. However, the thesis eventually surmounted the border as a novel political construct and evolved into a historico-anthropological study of the transformations in the understandings of self and community among the Armenian, Syriac, and Kurdish refugees in the French Jazira in the post-genocide world. It explored the processes of change in self-identification and the terms of communal belonging of these groups by delving into the (post) memories of 1915—as either directly witnessed, or as transmitted—and the (post) memories of the French mandate period, the political regimes under which the survivors came to live following their compulsory displacement from their homelands in present-day Turkey. It displayed the seminal role of French governance in laying the foundations of the citizenship regimes of the post-colonial Syrian states. As well as this, it demonstrated the sectarian appropriations of official forms as a means of unburdening from the colonial period and as an interplay between "powerlessness and empowerment" in 2000s Syria.

The thesis has aims to break the silence surrounding controversial ethnic, religious, and social issues that date from the colonial period in Syria, and to deconstruct the categories employed in the (post) memories of these debates and events. Against the dominant public discourse in Syria, which takes contested processes to be self-made entities, the thesis privileged questions of process, of the various forms of negotiation, of agency, and of socio-political background. It traced the transformation in the meanings of self, other, and community among the genocide survivors, their children and their grandchildren, from different classes. It showed the transformation in the imagination of religion in relation to state, politics, and social actors. It presented the political implications of the emerging forms and novel discourses as revealed in the historical narratives. It confirmed that memory work must be understood in the context of the social actors involved in its production, and the prevailing social conditions. Through a reading of archival material from the 1930s in juxtaposition with the (post) memories, and through tracing the colonial period in today's

discourses, this thesis has attempted to offer novel perspectives on two significant issues in Syria: state–society relations and the Kurdish issue.

Jazira formed the main site of this research. Characterized in the French accounts of the late 1920s by its inaccessibility and the infinity of its plains, and reachable only by a twice-weekly night train from Aleppo or the long and adventurous road from Damascus to Dayr al Zor, Jazira today has definitely become more accessible in social and physical terms. In 1941, Christopher Kininmonth, a British officer who served as an intelligence service officer in Qamishli, described a city with "grim little block houses lining every street, made of roughly cut stone or mud brick but so primitive that the wood doors with glass panels and flimsy grilles, even the windows, look as though they scarcely fitted into their apertures." A very small number of these houses continue to exist in present-day Qamishli, but the larger proportion have been replaced by the three or four-storey apartments characteristic of the middle-class Christian neighbourhood Hayy al-Wusta. The old neighbourhoods dating from the 1930s, such as Qaddour Beg, Bisheriyye, Anteriyya, Hileliyye or Gharbiyya, still exist, but little of the old multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities can be found on these sites. The city has physically expanded enormously and changed in composition, due to Kurdish immigration, Christian emigration, Arab settlement, changes in the relations of production, and so on. This physical extension has been accompanied by the peripheralization of the whole region. The renowned café Garbis—described by the same British officer as "the old gorgeous café where everyone spends most of the day … eat there, drink there, talk talk talk until the late evenings when all move to the brothel for beer, rarely if ever for the muscular ladies of an appropriately primeval appearance who serve it … "—does not exist anymore, the family who owned it having migrated to Lebanon in the mid 1960s. The officer goes on to describe the frequent visitors to Garbis:

> sheikhs in their finery and dignity, Kurds in a very pretty get-up hard to describe but featuring wide, calf-length trousers banded with woven in coloured patterns, jolly waistcoats, and jackets of the same and now the winter comes terrific sheepskin coats on top, black raffish turbans with fringes and the best moustaches on the face of man. Big chaps, big boots, pistols, daggers, cummerbunds—smashers in fact. Then the all sorts: Armenians, Turks, Assyrians, nomad, sedentary, Aleppine businessmen, Mosul ditto in Persian caps, Foreign Legionnaires, Syrian infantry, Syrian cavalry (numerous other uniformed and apparently private militias which I haven't sorted out yet) and popes and patriarchs, very grand robes, of a handful of sects, besides common or garden bishops … .[771]

[771] Christopher Kininmonth, *Frontiers* (Davis Poynter: London, 1971), p. 74.

Such a diverse group would hardly share a public space such as a café in Qamishli today.

The controversy regarding the Jaziran autonomy movement in the late 1930s, and its later failure, gave initial signs of Jazira's peripheralization thanks to the region's assimilation into the Syrian national(ist) space. It was followed by devastating population engineering policies following the union between Syria and Egypt (1958–61): the Arabization campaign of Jazira through the 1962 census, huge Christian immigration, and the anti-Kurdish Arab belt policy which was put into effect in 1963.

However, Jazira is a site where the predictions and foresights of both the colonialists and the modernization theorists are unmade. The state is almost always being addressed—whether praised or criticized—despite Jazira being farthest from both the centre and the process of incorporation into the national space. Moreover, the state-defined sect is always singled out; it spread into the everyday lives of various Jaziran sects. It is religion, usually in a state-sponsored form, which encapsulates all kinds of social, political, economic, and cultural differences. Religion becomes detached from its social environment and starts to be treated as a cohesive and exclusivist organizing principle. Although it is no more than one of a person's several belongings, it becomes a primary and exclusive marker of belonging to a community. In other words, religious heritage is deployed as a (primary) marker of socio-political identity, yet within a politically conformist discourse. The sectarian difference in Jazira is indeed furthered usually in rivalry with the other state-acknowledged sects *and* the non-acknowledged group—the Kurds. The unacknowledged Kurdish ethnic difference is highlighted, too, both vis-à-vis other sects and the official state ideology, yet through an anti-regime discourse.

However, the historical inquiry undertaken in this thesis has shown that sectarian imaginations of community are intrinsically linked to (post) colonial politics of difference *and* subaltern appropriations as a response to the former. It is within this framework that sectarianism, both as a set of relations and as a category of analysis- to borrow from Ussama Makdisi, was employed in this thesis. It is through the state-sponsored sectarianism from above, as well as particular manner of construction of both difference and distinction substantiated in the political and social imaginations of Syrian Christians and non-citizen Kurds, i.e. sectarianism from below, that religious sectarian and Kurdish nationalist belongings appeared in the Syrian Jazira.

Taking these points seriously, this thesis conceived Jazira, Jazirans, and Jaziran issues not as local affairs but as an indication of other, neglected, and unresolved contradictions and new

sites of political struggle. It aimed to link the Jaziran local and small-scale dynamic to the general one; yet at the same time it privileged local agency in carving out its own future. It undertook this task by de-localizing Jazirans and by recalling certain local acts, political organizations, and events with all their complexity and contested character. In this manner, it tried to depict the Jazirans as something other than self-made, one-dimensional, and unchanging subjects who are simply there waiting for incorporation and transformation by the forces of history and progress. Furthermore, the thesis has relied on the idea that the way Jazira—the "minority"—is folded into the national history tells us about the particularities of the nation or state—the "majority"—and about the course of its history. Such a dual task is embraced throughout the thesis.

"The presence of the past," the main motto of my dissertation, meant more than the persistence of atavistic memories or deterministic cultural structures of thought, as the orientalist colonial mindset assumed. [772]Historical imagination is not a simple transmission from the past, but an appropriation of the past or a discourse on the past where the form of the past is shaped and voiced by historical imagination in the present. [773] The formulation of historical knowledge is an active production of meaning in which a conception of the past is reconnected to the present.[774] In this sense, throughout the thesis, I approached social memory as not simply spontaneously shared memory, but as an "artefact" that is made through creative projects.[775] In Syrian Jazira today, official Arab nationalism, Assyrian/Syriac nationalisms, Armenian nationalism, and Kurdish nationalism are the main discourses from which (post) memories are informed: yet the (post) memories are neither absolutely determined by nor simply replicas of the official versions. Through a co-reading of memories and histories of certain historical incidents drafted at different times, this thesis has demonstrated that there is an ongoing tension between social memory and history. It has shown that memories do not stand freely in a vacuum, but that history provides the legitimatory framework in which memories are articulated. Though memories may be appropriated and transformed into history by hegemonic ideologies, they may also, on the other hand, be turned into a tool of resistance—as in the case of the Kurds in Jazira, and similar to the Palestinians vis-à-vis Israeli history—or into a tool for constitution, affirmation, and empowerment as is generally the case with Armenian and Syriac (post) memories vis-à-

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[772] James McDougall, *History and Culture*, p.3-4.
[773] Ibid.
[774] Ibid, p.4.
[775] Ibid., Introduction.

vis Turkish official versions of events and at times to the official Arab nationalist versions. More importantly for the purpose of this thesis, though, both history and memory play a significant role in the construction of the idea of community.

Obviously, the truth claims of the Syrian Jazirans' memories neither address only Syrian society, nor are they to be found only in Syria. Regarding Palestinian memories, Swedenburg has demonstrated that the "truth" of Palestinians' memories of revolt was *not* to be found solely in the 'field' that it was articulated.[776] Jazirans'—both Christians and Kurds—memories are no different. They were produced under conditions peculiar to the Third World, where "the problems and solutions … of culture are not only those that take place within a sacred national interior—the creative national mapmaking of the colonial powers made that clear. Instead, they take place in what is more like an international railway station than a national inner sanctum."[777] However, not all the Jazirans produce their memories in the same "railway station." While the Christians have a relatively more sheltered station (as long as they abide by the rules of the sheltering provided by the Syrian state), the Kurds have to produce their memories away from the shelter provided by the Ba'thist Syrian state.

Nevertheless, historical imaginations are definitely shaped and coloured by the conditions which the past has produced. In this regard, as demonstrated in Chapter 1, the 1915 Armenian genocide is a central event, a critical juncture in history which ruined a whole way of life and destroyed previous economic, social, political, and cultural spaces among all the peoples of the region, both victims and perpetrators. The main historical events underlying the the Jaziran Kurdish and Christian subjectivities are their transition into a radically changed world within the new nationalist order of the Turkish Republic, and their exposure to another wave of state violence in 1925, which was directed at the Kurds and led to the co-displacement of Kurds and Christians into the French Jazira. The encounter with the French colonial sectarian politics of difference and anti-colonial Arab nationalist responses, followed by the regime change to post-colonial Arab nationalism in 1946 and Ba'th rule (1961–), constitute the historical setting that informs the identification of self, community, and the other—the main themes discussed in this thesis.

An archive-based formal historical study about the French Jazira (1926–1939), set out in Chapters 3 and 4, and to a lesser extent the local history of the Jaziran refugees' place of origin, namely the countryside of Ottoman-Diyarbekir and Mardin, as collected from

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[776] Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 3.
[777] Mary Layoun, "Fictional Formations and Deformations of National Culture", *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 87, 1 (1988), p.57. Taken from Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt*, p. 3.

secondary sources, has attempted to capture the past that fashioned and burdened the post-colonial times. This historical inquiry accompanied my analysis of the Jazirans' (post) memories. The near-absence of empirical historical studies about this peripheralized region was one of the reasons which underlay my attempt to reconstruct the history of the region under French colonial rule. But more importantly it was the resurgence of diverse accounts of the colonial past among different ethno-religious groups and social classes in present-day Jazira, which at times contradicted the historical record that persuaded me to undertake a historical study. The questions in my historical work were informed by my intention to deconstruct and trace the history of the exceptionalism and sect-centrism intrinsic to the (post) memories. I have not only aimed to demonstrate the colonial legacy in the post-colonial subjectivity among different groups in the Syrian Jazira, but also the role of the power relationships and sociopolitical setting in the formation of historical imaginations at different times. In this manner, I have attempted to show how representation is embedded in power relations through displaying different representations of community revealed under different political contexts.

The shift in the axis of this dissertation towards a combination of seemingly disconnected historical incidents, and its touching upon several debates which fall into different areas of scholarly inquiry, may seem eclectic to some readers. But this was inescapable simply because Jazirans have been informed by multilayered power structures, institutions, and agents under different settings—at the least, the late Ottoman empire/nationalist Turkish state, colonial French, and later the Arab nationalist Syrian state. It should be stated that the choice of themes, such as in Chapter 2, including the (post) memories of the Armenian genocide and the state violence during the Sheikh Said Revolt, as well as the chronological flow of the thesis, has aimed to privilege the Jazirans Christians' and Kurds' experiences of the course of history, which is usually marginalized in mainstream historiography of all kinds, including the rivalling nationalist historiographies of each group. Accordingly, the Sheikh Said Revolt has been recontextualized as a turning point in Kurdish national history, thanks to the nationalist compartmentalization in Turkish, Armenian, and Kurdish historiographies, but its effect on the Armenians has not been explored. Similarly, being depicted as Kurdo-Christians, the Jaziran Syriacs' and Armenians' complex history is usually purged of its 'impure' elements in the nationalist narratives. This thesis has attempted to display the main outlines of their complex and indeed non-sectarian history. Embracing this scholarly inquiry as its starting point, the thesis has refrained from writing the history of a single group, namely Muslims, Christians, Kurds, Armenians, and so on. Based on the fact that none of these ethno-religious

groups are self-made and bounded entities, it problematized the category of "nation," "community," or "sect" and focused on the construction of these "communities"—so to speak, the process of "purification." The (post) memories were helpful in viewing the discourses of how the sect/nation works, rather than what it is. A comparative reading of different narratives about the genocide, the pre-genocide world, displacement from Turkey to Syria, and the controversial political movement of autonomy during the French rule helped me to problematize the category of sect/nation and the cultural-political process of institutionalizing "identity."[778] The thesis has argued that the exceptionalism intrinsic to the post-memories and the absence of a relational history approach in the historiography of each ethno-religious group have been shaped within the prevailing Turkish denialism as well as the colonial French and post-colonial Syrian state practices that have reformed religious difference in certain ways. The politics of fear and the politics of difference of the Ba'thist Syrian state inform the narratives in a significant way.

It is fair to say that the thesis has focused more on the representations of subaltern subjectivities than on subaltern politics. It might seem as if I presupposed a strict barrier between the elite and the subaltern, and opted for the latter; or as if I approached the Jazirans' historical discourses (revealed in (post) memories) as the truths they claim to be and re-transcribed a particular worldview and self-view on its own terms. However, I have attempted to interrogate the historical discourses of my interviewees and investigate the social-historical location of such claims. I have questioned the particular historical discourses which imposed (dis)continuity and causality between certain historical incidents that occurred in different contexts. I have tried to uncover and lay out the historical foundations of the categories of self and community employed in the accounts of certain past events. I have set out the processes of the de-politicization of the Christian communities and the politicization of Kurds. This endeavour has helped me to introduce and touch upon different areas and themes which are either marginalized, or not conjointly dealt with within Middle East studies. This is where the intended novelty of this thesis lies.

The (post)memories of the 1915 genocide and its aftermath in the rememberings of those non-Turkish ethnic and religious groups who were expelled from Turkey to Syria during the 1920s and 1930s is one such case. The analysis of the post-memories has demonstrated how a "Turkish-Armenian issue" endured as such in French-Syria and in the post-independence Syrian context, thanks to Turkish denialism, yet at the same time was transformed into a

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[778] James McDougall, "Introduction: History/culture/politics of the Nation," *Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2003), pp. 1-13.

"Syrian issue" due to the politics of difference of the new colonial and post-colonial regimes that these groups encountered upon their arrival. It has demonstrated how the past violence is constantly rewritten in terms of the present conflict. It has shown how personal experiences of violence are co-opted and appropriated in the construction of political ideology. It has also shown the role of erasure and amnesia in the constitution of collective memories and imagined communities.

Another issue that this thesis has tackled is the relationship between local Syrians and the post-1915 refugees, the impoverished and socially uprooted groups of people. As the refugee issue in the Middle East is often associated with the post-1948 Palestinian refugees, while the non-Muslim groups, especially those outside Lebanon, are conceived as self-enclosed groups without any transformative agency, scholarship on Syria lacks in-depth studies about the dialectically constitutive relationship between the non-Arab and non-Muslim refugees, the local Syrians and the (post)colonial state. This thesis has undertaken a critical reading of refugee-ness in Syria upon the former's early arrival, the contested understandings of refugee as a political or legal/bureaucratic fiction/identity, the transformation in the notion of refugee in the Arab nationalist imagery from the early encounters in the early 1920s to the post-colonial period, and domestic and regional politics and ideology as the constitutive outside of the refugee subjectivity.

As the Jaziran Christians and Kurds were received as "refugees" in the 1920s by the French mandate authorities, and acknowledged as such by the local Syrian population and Arab nationalist politicians by being added to the existing post-1915 refugees in French-Syria, I was able to undertake my task of making genealogies of the present-day Jaziran subjectivities with reference to the debates in the Refugee Studies literature. Refugee-ness and the notion of a refugee was not the sole axis traced throughout the thesis, however. This is mainly due to the absence of an independent refugee politics among the newcomers from Turkey—unlike what is the case with post-1948 Palestinian refugees. As well as this, in French-Syria the controversial debate about refugees and refugee-ness of the early 1920s was soon superseded by the majority–minority debate in the mid 1930s. The transformation of the debate into one which has more sectarian overtones was intrinsically linked to the French imperial strategy of divide and rule, which attached most importance to religious divisions and maintaining and extending the Ottoman *millet* rule. In other words, the colonial power-holders usually treated the refugees differently based on their religious belongings. However, formalizing and confirming religious divisions were not only an imperial tool. There were Syrians, both among the local Syrians and the newcomers too, who had a stake in the colonial

politics of difference. Still, the newcomer populations, in particular the Christians and their secular and religious elites, were divided politically, socially, and economically. While certain groups organized political movements built on colonial politics of religious difference and demanded its radicalization, the dominant political strategy was to opt for a negotiationary line which was based on de-politicization of all kinds, in particular with respect to religious difference. This political stance has continued through the post-colonial phase, particularly among the Christian newcomers. Another reason why refugee-ness was not taken as the main category of analysis in this thesis stems from the peculiar situation of Jazira, where almost the whole population was composed of Kurdish and Christian refugees from Turkey—leaving hardly any room for controversial encounters between newcomers and local Syrians. Although the refugee issue reappeared in a different context within the autonomy movement in the post-1936 period, it never gained the upper hand. The suppression of the Jaziran autonomy movement and the gradual incorporation of the Syrian Christians (ex-refugees and locals) into the post-colonial regimes in Syria in a changing regional and international context is yet another significant reason why the refugees were not taken as a self-defined category of analysis. Significantly enough, assimilation of Syrian Christians into the post-colonial regime and their de-politicization was accompanied by the increasing exclusion and alienation of the Kurds after the new citizenship law and the Arab belt policies during the Ba‘th period. Currently, Syriac Christians in Jazira, as elsewhere in Syria, regard themselves as "autochthones" (and have been acknowledged as such by the Ba‘th state), while more than 300,000 Jaziran Kurds are officially treated as aliens by the state and various Christian Jazirans, a label through which their current stateless status is legitimized. For these reasons, then, rather than adopting a refugee axis, the framework of this study turned out to be "minority-ness/majority-ness," its emergence and (re)production, as revealed in the (post) memories of certain historical events and as shaped in certain historical periods.

This thesis has argued that minority and majority are not fixed social categories to which one belongs by birth, but are bound up with political, economic, social, cultural, or even epistemological projects of difference-making, in which the agency of the social actors also plays an important role. Chapter 1, on the micro and macro politics of memory in Syrian Jazira, exposed the conditions under which Jazirans from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds invoke sectarian and ethnic difference. I have pointed out the ways in which Jazirans' memories of exile, settlement, and French mandate days in Syrian Jazira are reworked by today's socioeconomic and political exigencies prevailing in Syria and in the region more generally. I have aimed to connect people's ways of imagining the Self and the

Other to the ways in which social, political, and material relations are being organized. I argued that the outrageous violence of the *ferman* period forms the main incident that disturbed the old terms of belonging and the old world of multi-religious coexistence. It opened a pro-Christian wound in the psyche of the survivors and a deep guilt for the perpetrators. I mentioned the role of Turkish denialism in this context. I referred to the formative role of the refuge under French colonial rule, in particular the colonial refugee, religious, and administrative politics in the self- and social empowerment of the Christians in particular. The refugee settlement policy and elite-dominated sectarian rule in the French Jazira, with its pro-Christian bias, were built onto the politicization of the existing "differences" among the newcomers, whereas the Ba'th populist ethno-politics is based on de-politicizing the difference and turning them into "religio-cultural" communities. These two political regimes (in)form the socio-political space in which the local actors and the elites engage in a political struggle to redefine their communal identities in the new power configuration. I claimed that these historical processes are conjured up in the mainstream nationalist/sectarian discourses of each community, which relate to the Syrian Arab nationalist discourse in different ways and by which the collective memory of the Jazirans about the *ferman* and its aftermath are informed. I mentioned that these mainstream discourses of Christian groups, represented by the church and other community institutions, have recently begun to be challenged from both inside and outside the community, especially by the adherents of more radical versions of nationalist ideologies, e.g. Assyrianism.

Chapter 3 exposed the material and social basis underlying the empowerment of the Christians, as a group, in Jazira under French colonial rule. The chapter attempted to present the material processes informing the sectarian belongings in Syria and Jazira, which the Christian post-memories tend to marginalize, and whose colonial agency, its undertakings, and its local beneficiaries are singled out in the Kurds' post-memories. This comparative reading aimed to draw attention to the role of the present-day power relations in past reconstructions. It suggested that the excess of memories in Syria is tamed through appropriating the Syrian official Arab ideology which breeds a state-approved sectarian discourse of community.

Chapter 4 focused on the controversial post-treaty years and the Autonomy Movement in Jazira. It argued that the debates underlying the political contesting of Syrian unity and independence by the Regionalist Movement in the 1930s are implied in the ways the Christians situate themselves vis-à-vis the Syrian society and state in the 2000s. It demonstrated that today's middle-class Jaziran Syriacs' (post) memories resonate with the

Arab nationalist representations of the Autonomy Movements in the 1930s. In 1936, it was the Syrian-Arab nationalists who despised the autonomy movement and violently strove to impose their own understandings of nation (which was also in the process of formation throughout these confrontations). In the 2000s, it is usually the Christians of Jazira, in particular the Syriacs, who have adopted the terms of the Arab nationalist discourse of the 1930s, yet refashioned it in a "sectarian" manner, in a way which the post-colonial regimes did not intend. This re-appropriation of the 1930s' official version suggests that the dynamics underlying the social, economic, and demographic change of Jazira in the post-colonial period also underlie the form/forging of memories.

Chapter 2 showed the central place of the traumatic violence of 1915 in the Christians' (post)memories and silence about the existing state violence in Syria. Looking at the petitions drafted by the religious elites in the 1930s addressing the colonial authorities, it also showed that the memory work must be understood both in the context of the social actors involved in its production and the social conditions of its production. It pointed out the formative role of the colonial period in the change in the meaning of religion. The same chapter showed that the Kurds' post-memories conceived the genocide days as a "Zeitgeist" and blurred their agency in the violence rather than undertaking a real confrontation with their past. Chapter 3 demonstrated that the colonial agency is trivialized in the official state discourse and in the Christians' post-memories, while it is recognized in the Kurds' (post)memories. Chapter 4 showed that sectarian question of 1930s as revealed in the majority-minority debates, is acknowledged neither by the Ba'thist state nor by the pro-state sectarian discourses, unlike the Kurds' memories, which recognize it usually in terms of the present-day conflict. To answer the question of whether such historical narratives should be considered as anti-colonial and counter-hegemonic, one should look to what extent they encompass a potentially radical reconfiguration of the existing hegemonic structures. The mainstream Christian post-memories re-articulated the hegemonic official Ba'th discourse, yet in a sectarian way. While Christianity as revealed in (post)memories was in many respects an identity and a strategy of empowerment vis-à-vis the limitations surrounding their lives, it also strengthened the social control upon them through the church institutions and the community. Although it provided them with alternative spaces and opportunities, it also reinforced the communal boundaries, thus limited their space of action and imagination. Moving within these lines usually made these people complicit in maintaining the political order that had negative ramifications for most Syrians, especially the Jaziran Kurds, as well as political dissidents. Kurds' (post) memories, however, usually targeted the master dominant nationalist narratives, thus may be

considered as oppositional, although they still distance themselves from a true confrontation concerning their complicity in 1915. Nevertheless, a Kurdish exceptionalism bears similar dangers.

Neither Syriac exceptionalism nor Arab–Kurdish conflicts are expressions of primordial loyalties; nor of mindless tribalism and fanaticism. Instead they are the expressions of the continuing violence and inequalities in society. "Sect," as shown in the thesis, was institutionalized throughout the colonial encounter between the local elites and the French. The post-colonial regimes aimed to decolonize and depoliticize sectarianism, but never replaced it with a notion of general and equal citizenship. Sect is now employed in the individual and communal processes of coping with the various problems in the country and the region. The sectarian narratives in the memories reflect and reinforce, yet at times counter, the prevailing hegemonic order in Syria. This order grants the "white Christians" with relative safety and protection in Syria under a repressive regime where the Islamist and Kurdish challenges to it are gaining ground. However, it is not only the establishment of a semi-autonomous Kurdish government in Iraq after the US occupation or the increasing Islamization of Syrian society that are giving way to Kurdish nationalism and deepening Christian sectarianisms, but also the authoritarian structures and the failure of post-colonial regimes to create equal societies that lead to increasing marginalization and frustration of Kurds, and Christian insecurities and political comformity. The regime sustains its authoritarian rule through this populist sectarian system, emphasizing difference, and building up inequalities between each bloc in order to prevent the formation of a discourse of commonality which cross-cuts different ethnic and religious groups.

Therefore, these particularist tendencies would not be resolved even if sectarianism was built into the political system, as in Lebanon. Creating vibrant social spaces cross-cutting the sectarian boundaries—which at present are well protected by the state and the church establishment—and creating organized collectivities that could operate autonomously of the state and in which alternative political visions could be formulated, might provide a means of breaking out of the unequal communitarian system in Syria today.

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Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift is een historisch-antropologische studie naar de opvattingen van Armeense, Syrische en Koerdische vluchtelingen over de de genocide. Onderzoek is gedaan naar de veranderingen van de collectieve en individuele zelf-definities in Jazira tijdens het Franse Mandaat Syrië (1915-1939). Door de vluchtelingen te vragen naar de herinneringen aan deze periode, werpt dit proefschrift licht op de nieuwe politieke orde, waarin zij terechtkwamen na de gedwongen verdrijving van hun thuisland naar het hedendaagse Turkije. De studie geeft aan dat het Franse koloniale bestuur een cruciale rol heeft gespeeld in het leggen van de fundamenten van burgerschap en burgerrechten van de onderzochte groep in de post-koloniale Syrische staten.

Dit proefschrift illustreert niet alleen hoe de specifiek sektarische toepassing en het beleid van officiële aktes destijds ingevoerd werd, maar ook hoe dit doorspeelt in de huidige, post-2000 Syrische context.Het helpt de nieuw geconstrueerde elite om zich te ontdoen van de historisch koloniale lasten, en het een handig middel in het reguleren van de complexe samenspel tussen "macht en onmacht".

Door diverse (archief) bronnen uit de jaren ’30 van de vorige eeuw intensief te bestuderen; deze vervolgens te plaatsen naast de (etnografische) bronnen over de herinneringen; en tot slot de koloniale periode in hedendaagse vertogen te reconstrueren, biedt dit proefschrift nieuwe perspectieven op twee van de belangrijkste kwesties in Syrië: 1) de relaties tussen de staat en de maatschappij en 2) de Koerdische kwestie.

Summary

This thesis is a historico-anthropological study of the transformations in the understandings of self and community among the Armenian, Syriac, and Kurdish refugees in the French Jazira in the post-genocide world. (1915- 1939). It explored the processes of change in self-identification and the terms of communal belonging of these groups by delving into the (post) memories of 1915 and the French mandate period, the political regimes under which the survivors came to live following their compulsory displacement from their homelands in present-day Turkey. It displayed the seminal role of French colonial governance in laying the foundations of the citizenship regimes of the post-colonial Syrian states. As well as this, it demonstrated the sectarian appropriations of official forms as a means of unburdening from the colonial period and as an interplay between "powerlessness and empowerment" in 2000s Syria.Through a reading of various archival material from the 1930s in juxtaposition with the (post) memories, and through tracing the colonial period in today's discourses, this thesis has attempted to offer novel perspectives on two significant issues in Syria: state–society relations and the Kurdish issue.